Brandywine falls to Lumen Christi in state semis

Page B1

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Today's The Herald-Palladium included inside

Niles Star

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Local leaders discuss possible SMCAS, Medic 1 merger

By DEBRA HAIGHT
Leader Correspondent

NILES — Area leaders heard the what and why behind a possible merger of the Medic 1 and Southwestern Michigan Community Ambulance Services at community meetings Monday and Tuesday and are now turning their attention to the "how".

Community meetings were held Monday afternoon at Corewell Health in St. Joseph and Tuesday morning at the Niles City Council chambers in Niles. Each meeting was attended mainly by local governmental leaders and ambulance staff.

The two ambulance services have been talking about a possible merger for the last few years and hired a consultant in early 2025. That consultant, Matt Zavadsky, has many years of experience in the emergency services field and met with area leaders here over the last several months in preparing his report.

See **MERGER**, page A4

BERRIEN COUNTY

County to seek grant for park improvements

By JULIE SWIDWA
Paxton Media Group

NILES — Berrien County will apply for a Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant to help pay for improvements at Madeline Bertrand County Park.

Approval of the grant application came during Thursday's county board meeting following a presentation earlier in the morning by Berrien County Parks Director Jill Adams that was followed by a public hearing.

Attendance was sparse and there were no comments or questions from the public Thursday, although county commissioners had a few questions that were answered by Adams.

She said Madeline Bertrand County Park, located in Niles Township and owned and operated by the county, has become a very popular recreation area. A new, all-season, multi-use facility would replace what was known as the River Shelter, which was demolished in 2024 based on its age and environmental deterioration.

See **PARK**, page A4

Buchanan School Farm Barn named 2026 'Barn of the Year'

SUBMITTED

BUCHANAN — Buchanan Community Schools has announced that the Buchanan School Farm Barn has been selected as a recipient of the prestigious 2026 Barn of the Year Award, presented by the Michigan Barn Preservation Network.

This award, which is the MBPN's highest honor, recognizes barns and owners that best exemplify the mission of preserving Michigan iconic agriculture structures and rich farming heritage. The Buchanan School Farm Barn was selected by a panel of nine judges from a competitive pool of entries across the state.

The nomination was a collaborative effort led by the Buchanan School Farm Advisory Council. The district thanked the committee members whose hard work and stewardship made the distinction possible: Mark Nixon, Kelly Laesch, Al Whitfield, Jeff Bailey, Ben Davison, Ryan Masten, Melanie Byrdak, Melissa Frost and Monica Luke.

"This recognition is a testament to the dedication of our community and the School Farm Advisory Council," said Monica Luke, Council Member. "Preserving this barn isn't just about maintaining a building; it's about honoring Buchanan's agricultural roots and providing a unique, living classroom for our students. We are incredibly proud of the work our council has done to protect this local landmark."

See **BARN**, page A4

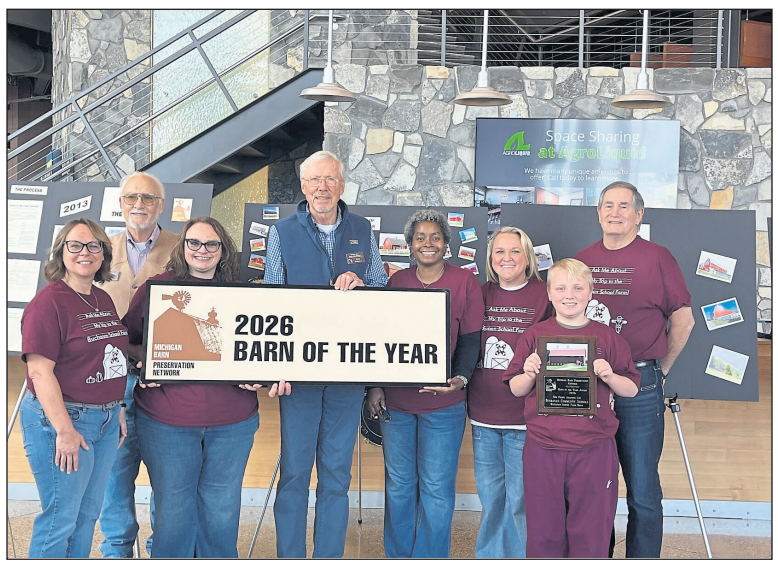

Photo provided

The Buchanan School Farm Barn has been selected as a recipient of the ichigan Barn Preservation Network's prestigious 2026 Barn of the Year Award.

A LEGACY REMEMBERED

Photo provided

The Buchanan baseball team's field has been dedicated to the memory of 1999 BHS graduate Ryan A. Tucker.

Buchanan High School baseball field renovated, dedicated as Ryan A. Tucker Field

By PMG STAFF

BUCHANAN — Buchanan Community Schools' baseball program will take the field this season on a newly renovated facility dedicated to the memory of 1999 BHS graduate Ryan A. Tucker.

The transformation of the field was made possible through a generous anonymous gift managed by the Michigan Gateway Community Foundation. Upgrades feature modern field materials, a redesigned infield, fencing, and a new irrigation system.

These improvements will help extend the life of the facility while creating a safer, more consistent playing surface for student-athletes.

"The field is absolutely beautiful." Said first year Buchanan Varsity Baseball Coach Keith Schreiber. "The kids love it. It will help instill a sense of pride in the program for years to come."

"We are incredibly grateful to the generous anonymous donor whose gift has made this transformation possible," said Patricia Robinson, Superintendent of Buchanan Community Schools. "The renovation of our baseball field is a true testament to the power of community, and it is a privilege to dedicate this space in memory of Ryan A. Tucker."

Buchanan High School Athletic Director, Reid McBeth, who coached Tucker, said the dedication adds deeper meaning to the project.

"Ryan was an easygoing, fun-loving individual who brought positive energy to everyone around him." McBeth said. "He loved being a Buck. This dedication ensures that his spirit and love for the game will continue to inspire future players who step onto that field."

See **LEGACY**, page A4

6 54708 09550 1

Today's obituaries • Page A3

Doug Horein, Stephen Jess, Thomas Colley, Danielle Kirtdoll, Lucia Hendershott, H. Elaine Parrish, Earl Hansen, Jane Clevenger, Jerry Hurlbutt, Dr. Stephen E. Jess, Betty Gillhouse, Ricky L. Krueger, Lefoy Anderson, James Green, Frederic R. Smith, Sue Mansfield, Timothy Curtis, Devin Bidwell

Inside today's Herald-Palladium

Automotive	C6	Focus	B1	Opinion	B6
Business	C4	Food	B7	Puzzles	B4
Comics	B5	Home & Garden	C7	Television	D3

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FRANKLY

Tips and quips

What is Frankly? It is where readers sound off on issues of the day. Have a tip or a quip? Call Frankly at 269-687-7700 or email rich.cains@leaderpub.com.

■ Ryan A. Tucker Field is simply awesome. The renovation is amazing.

■ Much love and prayer for the family who lost their son during the storm.

■ I found the Oscar tributes very moving. Babs singing "The Way We Were" for Robert Redford was really special. Billy Crystal's tribute to Rob Reiner, and having the actors on stage, was really something.

■ Congratulations Brandywine on a great basketball season. Standards never graduate.

■ I fear these gas prices are going to push us well beyond $4 per gallon. It's hard to get by nowadays with the high costs of everything else. Two promises this President made was to get prices down and not go to war. He has failed miserably on those two things.

■ Hats off to coach Josh Hood and the Bobcats for representing southwest Michigan with class.

■ Now that the illegal tariffs need to be paid back to the American business importers, is that money going to hit my wallet? Heck no. The businesses will keep it and get a windfall of taxpayer money.

■ Saw that Affordable Lawn Care Solutions has set up shop in Dowagiac. Good people. It's always great to see a quality business choose to plant roots in town.

Flowers Early Learning CEO named Michigan Head Start Association Executive Director

SUBMITTED

PAW PAW — Flowers Early Learning announced today that Chief Executive Officer Chanda Hillman has been named the next Executive Director of the Michigan Head Start Association (MHSA), where she will lead statewide efforts to support and advocate for Head Start and Early Head Start programs serving children and families across Michigan.

HILLMAN

Hillman currently serves as CEO of Flowers Early Learning, a nonprofit organization providing Head Start and Early Head Start services to children and families across Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties. Hillman's journey with the organization began as a parent in the program in 2014. Inspired by the impact Head Start had on her family, she joined Flowers Early Learning in 2016 as a part-time recruiter. In 2018, Hillman was selected to become only the third CEO in the organization's more than 50-year history.

During her tenure, Hillman worked alongside the organization's board of directors, staff, families, and community partners to strengthen services for children and families and expand community awareness of the critical role high-quality early childhood education plays in supporting families and strengthening local communities.

"Head Start has always been deeply personal to me," said Hillman. "I first experienced the program as a parent, and I have had the incredible privilege of serving alongside the dedicated staff, families, and community partners who make this work possible every day. Flowers Early Learning will always hold a very special place in my heart."

Under Hillman's leadership, Flowers Early Learning continued building on its long-standing legacy of serving children and families across Southwest Michigan through comprehensive early childhood education, health, and family support services.

"Chanda's journey reflects the very heart of Head Start," said Brian Saxton, Chair of the Flowers Early Learning Board of Directors. "She experienced the program as a parent, dedicated her career to supporting families, and became a leader who strengthened this organization and our community. While we will certainly miss her leadership, we are incredibly proud to see her take this next step as she advocates for children and families across Michigan. The strong foundation and bold vision she helped create will continue to move forward, ensuring Flowers Early Learning remains a leader for children and families in Southwest Michigan. The Board remains deeply committed to that vision and confident the organization will continue advancing this important work for the children, families, and communities we serve."

Hillman will continue serving as CEO of Flowers Early Learning through April while working closely with the Board of Directors to ensure a thoughtful transition and to begin the search for the organization's fourth CEO.

Flowers Early Learning remains committed to its mission of supporting children and families and will continue its work providing high-quality early childhood education and comprehensive family services across the region.

Vandalia man injured in Calvin Township crash

By PMG STAFF

CALVIN TOWNSHIP — A Vandalia man was injured Tuesday in a single vehicle crash in Calvin Township, according to the Cass County Sheriff's Office.

At approximately 7:20 a.m. Tuesday, deputies responded to a single-vehicle crash in the area of Union Road and Mt Zion Street in Calvin Township.

The investigation showed that a vehicle driven by James Huffman, 49, of Vandalia, was northbound on Union Road when he lost control on the snowy road, causing his vehicle to leave the roadway and strike a tree. Huffman was transported by SMCAS Ambulance to Memorial Hospital for injuries sustained in the traffic crash.

Cass Family Clinic appoints new community health worker manager

By PMG STAFF

CASSOPOLIS — Cass Family Clinic has appointed Michele Lofton as its new community health worker manager.

She will oversee all community health workers (CHWs) at its locations in Cassopolis, Niles and Dowagiac, as well as the Mobile Clinic.

LOFTON

"I'm excited to provide guidance to our invaluable community health workers at Cass Family Clinic and build a cohesive, solid team that can provide the support and services that our patients need," said Lofton.

Lofton, who has a master's degree in social work from Michigan State University, has worked with the elderly and individuals with developmental disabilities for over 38 years. Before joining Cass Family Clinic, she served as a residential director in Indiana and as a care manager at Cass County Council on Aging and Cass County Community Mental Health for 20 years.

Lofton will manage a team of eight colleagues who serve as liaisons between CFC patients and community partners who provide essential support such as food, transportation, shelter, diabetic and hypertension management, individual health assessments, and basic healthy-lifestyle assistance.

"I take pride in supporting our patients who lack access to transportation, food, and healthcare services," said Lofton, a former Cassopolis Village Council trustee and president. "Cass Family Clinic's mission emphasizes eliminating the barriers that prevent patients from leading healthy lives. To that end, it is essential that community resources are coordinated and made available to all of our patients."

"Michele understands firsthand the myriad factors that impact patients in our community and their health," said Cass Family Clinic CEO Joe Gavan. "As she oversees our community health workers, Michele will also be out in the community assessing needs, building relationships, establishing trusted partnerships, identifying additional resources, and providing training and leadership for our existing team. Her role is integral to expanding the reach of our care teams as they connect patients to care, vital resources, and essential support services throughout Southwest Michigan."

> **"I take pride in supporting our patients who lack access to transportation, food, and healthcare services."**
>
> **MICHELE LOFTON**
> Cass Family Clinic community health worker manager

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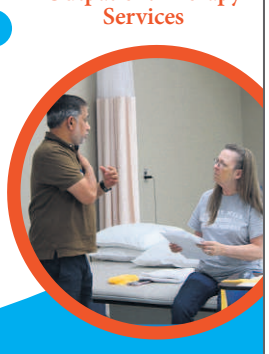
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OBITUARIES

Douglas Horein

February 23, 1959 – March 10, 2026

Douglas Allen Horein, 67, of Mishawaka, Indiana, passed away Tuesday, March 10, 2026 in his home after an extended illness. His life began February 23, 1959 in South Bend, Indiana to Terry L. and Kathryn "Kay" E. Horein, who preceded him in death.

Doug graduated from Penn High School and spent much of his life working in construction. He began his career working with Terry Horein Builders and continued in the construction field for many years. He was known as a hard worker who took pride in his work and the people he worked alongside.

More than anything, Doug valued time with his family. He loved the outdoors, especially hunting, and enjoyed sharing those moments and memories with the people he cared about most. He will be remembered for his generous and caring nature and his own sense of humor.

Doug will be greatly missed by family and friends. He is survived by his daughters, Katie Horein, Kaysie (Cameron) Sly; son, Cory Horein; granddaughters, Reggie Renae, Jordie Anne; sisters, Debby (Steve) Kildow, Donna (Brett) Schrock; brother, David (Celeste) Horein; and many extended family members.

Family and friends will gather Sunday, March 15, 2026 from 1:00 p.m. until time of service at 3:00 p.m. in Halbritter Wickens Funeral Services, 615 East Main Street, Niles. Doug's memory will live on in the hearts of all who knew and loved him. The family prefers contributions in Doug's memory be made to the Muscular Dystrophy Association, 1016 West Jackson Boulevard, #1073, Chicago, Illinois 60607.

Arrangements have been entrusted to Halbritter Wickens Funeral Services, Niles. Please share a memory or a message online: halbritter wickens.com.

Earl Hansen

January 14, 1927 – March 13, 2026

Earl Norman Hansen, 99, of Niles, died peacefully, Friday, March 13, 2026. His life began January 14, 1927 in Stanton, Michigan the third of three born to Harold and Jessie Hansen. Earl graduated from Eau Claire High School in 1945. He then went on to serve his country in the Army Air Corp. during World War II. Shortly after, he married Audrey Leiting on September 4, 1949.

Earl worked for Kawneer for nine years and then went on to work for National Standard for over thirty years before retiring. He was a member of Berrien Center Bible Church where he was involved as a board member and head usher. Earl and Audrey volunteered their time at the Berrien County Youth Fair, both at the gates and in the Grandstands for over sixty years.

Earl will be greatly missed by family and friends. He is survived by one daughter, Diane K. (Dr. James) Grannell of Niles; one son, Kirk W. (Debra) Hansen of Niles; four grandchildren, Dr. Justin (Alicia) Grannell, Josh (Marissa) Grannell, Jami Grannell, Jenna Grannell; six great grandchildren, Peyton, Connor, Jade, Jaren, Vivian, Jovi Grannell and a number of nieces and nephews.

He was preceded in death by his wife of sixty-four years, Audrey Hansen; one daughter, Dawn Hansen; one sister Viola Rudowske of Watkinsville, Georgia and one brother, Maurice Hansen of Berrien Center. Family and friends will gather Monday, March 23, 2026 from 6:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m. in Halbritter Wickens Funeral Services, 615 East Main Street, Niles and one hour prior to his service on Tuesday, March 24, 2026 at 10:00 a.m. in Berrien Center Bible Church, 8830 M-140 Berrien Center, Michigan 49102. Earl will be laid to rest next to his beloved wife, Audrey in Mission Hills Memorial Gardens.

The family prefers contributions in memory of Earl be made to Berrien Center Bible Church 8830 M-140 Berrien Center, Michigan 49102 or the Berrien County Youth Fair 9122 US-Highway 31 Box 7 Berrien Springs, Michigan 49103. Arrangements have been entrusted to Halbritter Wickens Funeral Services, Niles. Please share a memory or a message online: halbritterwickens.com.

H. Elaine Parrish

June 6, 1940 – March 9, 2026

H. Elaine Parrish, 85, of Niles, Michigan died peacefully Monday, March 9, 2026 in the comfort of her family's presence. Her life began June 6, 1940 in South Bend, Indiana the middle of three children born to Thomas and Hazel Sossoman. She married Andrew Ernest Parrish April 8, 1977 in Cassopolis, Michigan. After almost forty-one years of marriage, he preceded her in death in 2018. Elaine loved the Lord Jesus Christ and was an active member of her church. Elaine enjoyed working with people and her career spanned many fields. She and Andy were amateur photographers and enjoyed traveling together. Elaine loved hosting family and friends for holidays and especially the fourth of July fireworks in Niles. Elaine will be greatly missed by family and friends. She is survived by two sons, Larry (Jamie Fahlsing) Haines, Gary (Kimberly) Haines; a stepson, Robert (Rita) Parrish; twelve grandchildren; many great grandchildren; daughter-in-law, Hope Haines; and several nieces and nephews. In addition to her husband, she was preceded in death by her parents; one son, Carl Haines; her sister, Audrey Squires; her brother, Thomas D. Sossoman, Jr.; and her former husband Ronald Haines. Family and friends will gather at Youngs Prairie Cemetery, Quaker Street off Decatur Road, Cassopolis on Saturday, March 28 at 10:00 A.M. where Elaine will be laid to rest beside her beloved. The family would like to thank PACE of SW Michigan, Long Acres AFC of Buchanan, and West Woods of Niles for the love and compassionate care they gave mom in her later years. Arrangements have been entrusted to Wagner Family Funerals Connelly Chapel, Cassopolis. Please share a memory or a message online: wagnercares.com

Thomas H. Colley

November 10, 1948 – March 14, 2026

Thomas Henry Colley, a cherished family man and respected member of his community, passed away at the age of 77 on March 14, 2026, in Dowagiac, Michigan, due to natural causes. Born on November 10, 1948, in South Bend, Indiana, Thomas was the beloved son of the late Thomas H. and Betty (Kohler) Colley. His life was a testament to the values of kindness, handiness, and friendliness, which he embodied in every interaction.

In 1973, Thomas united in marriage with his loving wife, Donna Stanton, who preceded him in death. The legacy of their love continues through his children, Thomas (Carrie) Colley, Kelly (Sean) Mahon, Travis (Sunny) Colley, and Matthew (Jeannie) Colley. He was a doting grandfather to fifteen grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren, each of whom brought him immense joy and pride. Thomas's life was further enriched by his siblings, Bryon (Lynn) Colley, Mark (Carla) Colley, Linda Carpenter, Kawanna (Larry) Stoker, and Jackie (Jim) Lawrence, all of whom shared in the journey of his life's story. Thomas's work ethic was as strong as his character. He spent many years in manufacturing, where his dedication and skill were evident to all who worked alongside him. In his later years, he found great satisfaction in working with his sons, passing on his knowledge and witnessing their growth both personally and professionally. A man of faith, Thomas lived his Christian beliefs through his actions, offering help and hospitality to anyone in need. An avid outdoorsman, Thomas relished the time he spent in nature. Whether he was hunting, fishing, trapping, or mushroom hunting, he was in his element. His love for bowling and organizing family fish fry events brought him and his loved ones together, creating memories that will continue to warm their hearts.

Memorial contributions may be made in his memory to Hidden Acres 50582 Pleasant St, Dowagiac, Michigan 49047. A memorial service will be held on Thursday, March 19, 2026 at 11:00am at First Baptist Church, 604 E 3rd Street, Lawton, Michigan. A private interment will be held at Mission Hills Memorial Gardens. Arrangements have been entrusted to Brown Funeral Home & Cremation Services, Niles. www.BrownFuneralHomeNiles.com.

Death notices

Jerry Ray Hurlbutt, 78, of Niles, Michigan, passed away on March 10, 2026. Arrangements have been entrusted to Brown Funeral Home & Cremation Services.

Dr. Stephen E. Jess, 84, of Niles, passed away on March 11, 2026. Arrangements are pending and have been entrusted to Brown Funeral Home & Cremation Services, Niles. www.BrownFuneral HomeNiles.com.

Betty Jean Gillhouse, 78, passed away on Wednesday, March 11, 2026, in Niles, Michigan. Arrangements have been entrusted to and are pending with Brown Funeral Home & Cremation Services.

Ricky L. Krueger, 68, of Niles, passed away in Mishawaka on Friday, March 13, 2026. Arrangements are pending and have been entrusted to Brown Funeral Home & Cremation Services, Niles. www.BrownFuneral HomeNiles.com.

Lefoy "Lee" Anderson, 84, of Dowagiac, passed away on March 12, 2026. Funeral Service will be Friday, March 27, 2026 at 1:00 p.m. at Brown Funeral Home with visitation beginning at 12:00 p.m. Arrangements by Brown Funeral Home. www.Brown FuneralHomeNiles.com

James Green, 85, of Niles, passed away March 15, 2026. Funeral services will be Wednesday, March 25, 2026 at Brown Funeral Home at 1pm with visitation beginning at Noon. Arrangements by Brown Funeral Home & Cremation Services, Niles. www.BrownFuneralHome Niles.com.

Frederic R. Smith, Sr., 90, passed away on March 13, 2026 in Mishawaka. A celebration to honor Fred's life will be Saturday, March 21, 2026 at Christian Center Church at 530 E. Ireland Road, South Bend, Indiana 46614 at Noon. Brown Funeral Home & Cremation Services entrusted with arrangements.

Sue Ann Mansfield, 77, passed away on Saturday, March 14, 2026, in Mishawaka, Indiana. Arrangements have been entrusted to and are pending with Brown Funeral Home & Cremation Services.

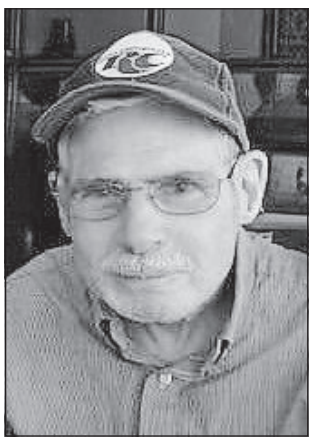
Jane Elizabeth Clevenger, 91, passed away on Tuesday, March 17, 2026, in Mishawaka, Indiana. Arrangements have been entrusted to and are pending with Brown Funeral Home & Cremation Services.

Timothy Wray Curtis, 68, passed away on Friday, March 13, 2026, in Niles, Michigan. Arrangements have been entrusted to and are pending with Brown Funeral Home & Cremation Services.

Devin Bidwell, 59, of Berrien Springs, Michigan, passed away on March 17, 2026 in Berrien Springs. Arrangements have been entrusted to Allred Funeral Home in Berrien Springs. Services to be held on March 23, 2026 at the Stevensville Seventh-day Adventist Church. www.AllredFuneral Home.com.

Dr. Stephen E. Jess

October 20, 1941 – March 11, 2026



Dr. Stephen E. Jess, a beacon of wisdom and kindness, passed away peacefully from natural causes on March 11, 2026, in Mishawaka, Indiana. Born on October 20, 1941, in Green Bay, Wisconsin, he was the beloved son of the late Harvey and Agnes (Engels) Jess.

Stephen's life was one of dedication, not only to his family but also to the countless students he guided throughout his career. Stephen's journey with his cherished wife, Deborah Brumitt Jess, began on a joyful note as they exchanged vows in Niles, Michigan, on December 29, 2001. Their love and companionship remained steadfast through the years, and she continues to honor his memory.

His legacy flourishes through his four children: Stephen (Catherine) Jess of Crosby, Texas, Kristin Jess-Seely (Jeff) of Temple, Texas, Kurt (Laurie) Jess of Bloomington, Minnesota, and Joanie Jess-Zakoor of Elkhart, Indiana, as well as his many step-children. Stephen's joy was multiplied with the birth of each of his seven grandchildren: Gavin, Alycia, Jessika, Rebekah, Kyla, Hannah, Kephren and his great-grandson, Stephen, who will miss their beloved patriarch deeply.

His sister, Karen (Robert) Cassidy of Kingwood, Texas, remembers him fondly, cherishing the memories they shared. A man of profound intellect and insight, Dr. Jess earned his PhD. in Education, which laid the foundation for a distinguished career. For forty-four years, he served as a Professor of Social Science and History at Southwestern Michigan College, where his passion for teaching and his commitment to his students' success left an indelible mark. His wisdom and intelligence made him a respected figure among peers and pupils alike.

Beyond the walls of academia, Stephen was an avid coin collector, a hobby that reflected his appreciation for history and the stories embedded within each piece. He found solace in the serenity of fishing, the camaraderie of golfing, and the connections fostered through social media, where he kept up with family and friends. Stephen was a true educator at heart, one who loved to share knowledge and inspire curiosity in all areas of life.

Memorial contributions may be made in Dr. Jess' memory to Center for Hospice Care 501 Comfort Place, Mishawaka, Indiana 46545. In keeping with his wishes, cremation has taken place and a luncheon to celebrate his life will be held at the Niles F.O.P. at 531 N. State Street, Niles, Michigan 49120 on Monday, March 16, 2026 at 1:00pm. Arrangements have been entrusted to Brown Funeral Home & Cremation Services, Niles. www.Brown FuneralHomeNiles.com.

As we bid farewell to Dr. Stephen E. Jess, we celebrate a life lived with purpose and love. His memory will be cherished and kept alive in the stories we share, the lessons he taught us, and the indomitable spirit he leaves behind.

Danielle 'Dani' Kirtdoll

March 20, 1984 – March 15, 2026

Danielle "Dani" Kristen Kirtdoll, 41, of South Bend, Indiana, died peacefully on Sunday, March 15, 2026. Danielle came into this world on March 20, 1984, in Niles, Michigan, the first born of Warren Watson and Tracey Toney. She married Chris Kirtdoll on January 29, 2010, in Cassopolis, Michigan.

Danielle was a devoted and loving wife and mother, and she cherished every moment spent with her husband, children, and stepchildren. She was an adored daughter, sister, friend, aunt, and cousin. Aunt Danielle never missed one of her niece Sofia's dance recitals. She was overjoyed by the recent birth of her youngest nephew, Warren Watson, III.

Danielle was known for her beautiful long brown hair, and her favorite color was baby blue. She was wonderfully creative and artistic. She enjoyed listening to music, shopping, and she was a thoughtful gift-giver. Her nieces and nephews always looked forward to Aunt Danielle surprising them with candy and sweets.

Danielle loved her two cats and her dog. She was selfless and had a heart of gold. She was always thinking about others, and she would go out of her way to help anyone who needed it. Danielle will be greatly missed by her family and friends.

She is survived by her husband of sixteen years, Chris Kirtdoll of South Bend, Indiana; two sons, Bailey Castillo of Clearwater, Florida, and Austin Castillo of South Bend; her daughter, Isabella Castillo of South Bend; stepson, Christopher Kirtdoll, Jr., of South Bend; her stepdaughter, Saniah Woods of South Bend; her mother, Tracey Toney of Niles; her father and stepmother, Warren & Darlene Watson of Niles; brothers, Anthony (Chelsea) Tracey of Niles, Warren (Lyndsey) Watson, Jr., of Royal Oak, Michigan, & Wesley Watson of East Lansing, Michigan; sister-in-laws, Nikki Kirtdoll & Ashley James of Niles; special niece Zhaneah, and a host of nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

She was preceded in death by her grandparents, Warren & Ruth Watson and Franklin & Betty Toney; father-in-law James Berry; mother-in-law, Debra Kirtdoll Flemming; sister-in-law, Knenah Kirtdoll; her cousin, Abigail Watson; one uncle, William "Bill" Watson; and two aunts, Christine Cosey and Josephine Kirtdoll.

Family and friends will gather for visitation on Friday, March 20, 2026 from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m. at Halbritter Wickens Funeral Home, 615 East Main Street, Niles, Michigan, to grieve the loss of her beautiful soul here on earth, and to share precious memories of Danielle. Funeral services will be held on Saturday, March 21, 2026 at 11:00 a.m. at Halbritter Wickens Funeral Home.

Danielle will be laid to rest in Silverbrook Cemetery. Arrangements have been entrusted to Halbritter Wickens Funeral Services, Niles. Please share a memory or a message online at halbritter wickens.com.

See more obituaries on page A4

Obituary policy

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BARN

From page A1

The official presentation took place during the Michigan Barn Preservation Network's Annual Conference Saturday, March 14 at the AgroLiquid Conference Center in St. Johns, Michigan. As part of the distinction, the Buchanan School Farm will receive:

■ A commemorative plaque for the facility.

■ A large-scale "Barn of the Year" sign to be displayed on the exterior of the structure.

■ A one-year membership to the Michigan Barn Preservation Network.

The Buchanan School Farm, located at 3588 Andrews Rd. in Buchanan, Michigan continues to serve as a vital link between the district's educational programming and the region's historical legacy. Members of the community are invited to celebrate this achievement as the district continues its commitment to preserving this local landmark for future generations of Bucks.

Following this statewide recognition, the community is invited to see the award-winning barn in person during the district's upcoming Plow Day & Pancake Breakfast Saturday, April 18 from 8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. The event will feature a pancake breakfast, tractor demonstrations, hands-on farming workshops and much more.

For more information about the Buchanan School Farm or the Michigan Barn Preservation Network, please visit buchananschools.com/school-farm or mibarn.net.

MERGER

From page A1

His presentations this week covered how ambulance services both here and around the country have gotten to the point where many are finding it difficult to continue to operate. He offered specific recommendations of what SMCAS and Medic 1 can do to improve their financial and operational situations including a possible merger.

Zavadsky began his presentation by calling both services "excellent" and saying residents are blessed to have them. Having said that, he said he found a number of areas where the services can improve when it comes to billing and staffing and that their outlook could be improved dramatically if they merge into one larger organization and achieve efficiencies.

He urged the services to raise their rates to insurance companies to gain more revenue and to also change how they deliver services. He pointed out that only a small portion of calls require advanced life support services and can be handled by people who are not paramedics which would free paramedics to answer the calls where they're most needed.

"This has gotten us to the point of what needs to be done, the next step is the how."

MIKE HILDEBRAND
Oronoko Township Supervisor and Medic 1 Board member

He acknowledged that merging the operation side of the two services will be "much easier" than merging their governance. Currently each service is operated by boards made up of local municipal leaders.

"You can't just combine the boards but find a new way to govern," he said. "You need to decide in your communities how you want to merge and create a new identity. This needs to be a community conversation."

Oronoko Township Supervisor and Medic 1 Board member Mike Hildebrand was among those in agreement. "This has gotten us to the point of what needs to be done, the next step is the how," he said.

He asked Zavadsky if he was available to consult on the how and got an affirmative answer. "It will be good to have a tour guide," Hildebrand then said. "It takes heat off some of the conversation that needs to happen if we have someone to hold our hand as we go along."

Questions came in a number of areas at Tuesday's meeting. Ambulance staff in attendance were concerned about staffing and duties, while government leaders wondered about response times and funding. More than one local leader asked if the services could partner without a full merger.

"We are in a time when our people need to realize that the service has a need that has to be filled whether that's a merger or a partnership," Howard Township Supervisor and SMCAS Board Chairman Bill Kasprzak said. "If we don't work together, we won't have a service at all."

PARK

From page A1

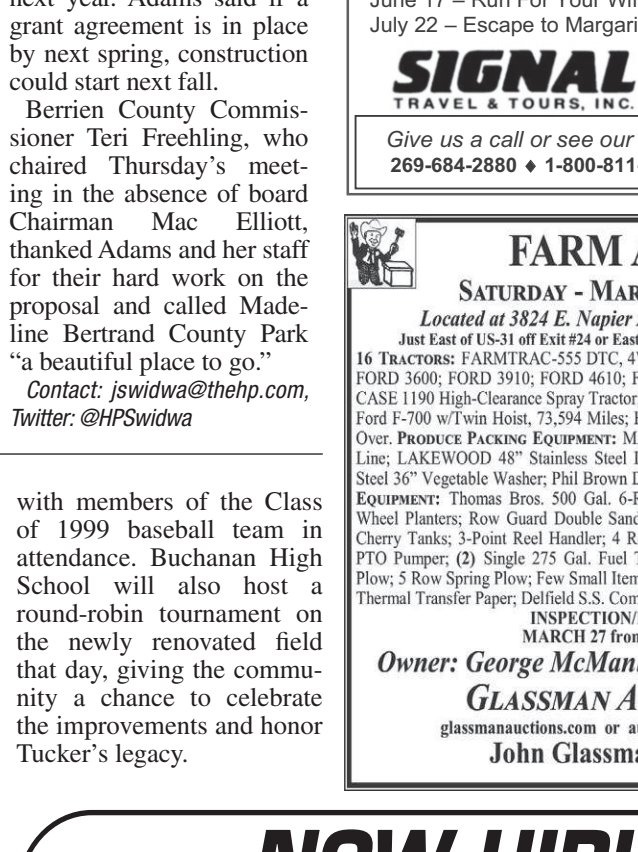
Creation of an all-season, multi-use pavilion/lodge was developed by park staff and fits well with the Berrien County Parks & Recreation five-year plan, she said.

If the county's grant application is approved, it will cover up to $400,000 of the anticipated cost of $1.38 million, Adams said. The remaining cost would come from the parks department budget, the endowment fund and/or donations and other grants.

In an interview following Thursday's Berrien County board meetings, Adams said the proposed Madeline Bertrand County Park Lodge would accommodate up to 200 people and would be available for groups and organizations to rent for things like business meetings, school field trips, scout group outings, office retreats, community events or training space.

When not reserved for rent, it would be open to park visitors.

"We're still working on exactly what that would look like, but it could include things like educational displays and private areas for people to work while enjoying nature," Adams said. "This project represents a thoughtful expansion that becomes a regional venue and provides a revenue stream."



Don Campbell / HP file photo
Berrien County is seeking a grant to help with improvements at Madeline Bertrand County Park in Niles Township.

Grant applications for these projects are due by April 1, and awardees will be notified in January of next year. Adams said if a grant agreement is in place by next spring, construction could start next fall.

Berrien County Commissioner Teri Freehling, who chaired Thursday's meeting in the absence of board Chairman Mac Elliott, thanked Adams and her staff for their hard work on the proposal and called Madeline Bertrand County Park "a beautiful place to go."

Contact: jswidwa@thehp.com, Twitter: @HPSwidwa

LEGACY

From page A1

The anonymous donor entrusted the gift to the Michigan Gateway Community Foundation to serve as the third-party fiduciary for the project.

"I'm thrilled to see the Michigan Gateway Community Foundation play a role in the transformational renovation of the baseball field at Buchanan High School," said Michael Rowland, President & CEO of the foundation. "As both a classmate and friend of Ryan Tucker, this project holds deep personal meaning for me. It's an incredible honor to help preserve Ryan's legacy in a way that will inspire future athletes and remind our community of the lasting impact one person can have."

A formal ribbon-cutting and dedication ceremony for Ryan A. Tucker Field will take place on April 18, with members of the Class of 1999 baseball team in attendance. Buchanan High School will also host a round-robin tournament on the newly renovated field that day, giving the community a chance to celebrate the improvements and honor Tucker's legacy.

OBITUARIES

Jane Clevenger

June 29, 1934 – March 17, 2026

Jane Elizabeth Clevenger, 91, passed away peacefully on March 17, 2026, in Mishawaka, Indiana. Born to Clark and Stella (Colegrove) Rhodes on June 29, 1934, in Niles, Michigan, Jane's life was a testament of dedication to family, friends, and the many lives she touched.

A 1952 graduate of Niles High School, Jane worked as a beautician for many years, a career where her artistry and warmth brought joy and comfort to countless individuals. She also worked in the factory at National Standard, which is where she would go on to meet her late husband, Edward Clevenger. She went on to work with Niles Community School Systems from which she retired, leaving behind a legacy of commitment and care.

Throughout her life, Jane was a devout member of Hope Community Church, where her unwavering faith and service were a testament to her loving heart and spirit. Family was the cornerstone of Jane's life. With the passing of her parents, Clark and Stella Rhodes, her loving husband Edward Clevenger, her dear brother William Rhodes, her sister Rosemary Barnes, and her great-grandson Cody Caraway, Jane's resilience and strength were evident.

She was the loving mother to her children, Paul (Vivian) Shrider III, Tracy (Clark) Baugher, Ronald (Wanda) Clevenger, Cindy Caraway, and Lisa (Joe) Emmons. The legacy of Jane's love and wisdom lives on through her eleven grandchildren and six great-grandchildren, who have been imbued with her courage, grace, and kindheartedness.

Among her fondest pastimes were her stitch club gatherings, playing card games that sparked joy and competitiveness, losing herself in the pages of a good book, and savoring the moments spent at family cookouts and fish fry's. These occasions were cherished by Jane and those who knew her and will be fondly remembered as celebrations of life and laughter.

Services for Jane, led by Pastor Mike Smith, will be held at Brown Funeral Home on Monday, March 23, at 2:00pm, with the family receiving guests beginning at 12:00pm. Memorial contributions in Jane's name may be made to Hope Community Church and The Berrien County Animal Control. Jane Elizabeth Clevenger's memory will forever be cherished and honored by all who were fortunate enough to walk a while alongside her on her journey.

The heavens have indeed received an extraordinary soul who will be remembered as much for her tenacity and resilience as for her unwavering love and kindness.

Lucia Hendershott

May 10, 1931 – March 11, 2026

Lucia (Brothers) Hendershott, 94, of Niles, died peacefully Wednesday, March 11,2026 in the comfort of her family's presence. Her life began May 10, 1931 in Niles, Michigan, the fifth of six children born to Edward and Cecelia Brothers. Lucia Brothers attended Niles High School until 1948 when she married Ralph W. Hendershott November 13, in Saint Joseph Michigan.

She had several careers, she was a waitress, cook for Associates Lodge and worked as a lab technician for the USDA in Niles. Lucia had special times traveling with her mother and daughter to Ireland, Hawaii and Las Vegas. She particularly enjoyed Siegfried and Roy and Liberace.

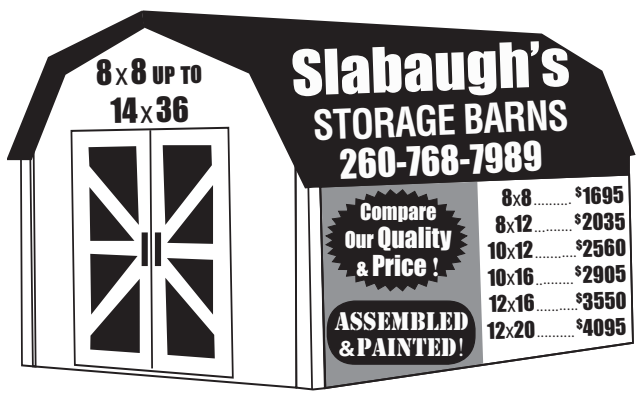
Lucia had fun visiting casinos, playing lottery and bingo. She could often be found putting together puzzles with her last puzzle being just this last summer. Lucia kept track of her out of state family and friends by writing letters. She especially loved spending time with her family.

Lucia will be greatly missed by family and friends. She is survived by one son, Ralph W. (Suzette) Hendershott jr. of Buchanan; two grandchildren, Levi (Monica) Hendershott of Portage, Carisa (Randy) Simpson of Niles; three great grandchildren, Ginger Hendershott, Devon Simpson, Esme Simpson and a host of nieces and nephews. She was preceded in death by her husband of sixty-eight years, Ralph W. Hendershott, daughter, Janet Hendershott, two brothers and three sisters.

Family and friends will gather Monday, March 16, 2026 10:00 A.M. until the time of her Mass at 11:00 A.M in St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception Church, 219 South State Street, Niles. Lucia will be laid to rest next to her beloved husband and daughter, in Silverbrook Cemetery. The family prefers contributions in memory of Lucia be made to St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception and St. Jude 501 St. Jude Place, Memphis, Tennessee 38105.

Arrangements have been entrusted to Halbritter Wickens Funeral Services, Niles. Please share a memory or a message online: halbritterwickens.com.

More obituaries on page A3



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OPINION

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Health insurance jargon can be frustrating and confusing – here's how to navigate it

By JAMIE HARTMANN-BOYCE and MICHAL HORNÝ
UMass Amherst (The Conversation)

THE CONVERSATION

What often makes coinsurance confusing is that while the coinsurance rate – the percentage – is usually listed on your health insurance card, you still need to know the total cost of your care to calculate how much you will owe. That cost is difficult to know in advance because reliable health care prices are difficult to find and health care needs – and the services required to treat them – can be unpredictable.

Since the Affordable Care Act subsidies expired at the end of 2025, Americans have undoubtedly been encountering a great deal of confusing information surrounding health care costs and insurance plans.

From five-figure deductibles to premiums higher than people's mortgages, costs are rising across the board.

With this comes difficult decisions around health care plan enrollment. No one can know exactly what their health care needs will be in any given year, so people are forced to hedge their bets in choosing plans.

What plan you pick has a huge impact on what you will end up paying.

However, many Americans don't understand key health insurance terms. For example, people who've completed fewer levels of education and people without health insurance are less likely to understand the jargon. This can get in the way of picking the right plans.

As scholars of health policy, evidence-based health care and health economics, we believe understanding these terms can help you pick what plan might be the best for you.

Frequently encountered health insurance terms

The first of these is your health insurance premium. This is the amount you pay each month for having health insurance coverage, whether or not you use any services. Premiums can be expensive, but they are predictable. Once your premium is set for the year, it won't change.

What's much harder to predict is how much of each medical bill you will have to pay yourself, known as out-of-pocket costs. These are sometimes also referred as "patient cost-sharing" or "copays." These typically come in three forms: deductibles, coinsurance and copayments.

A deductible is how much you need to spend on your health care in a given year before your insurance starts covering any costs. Under plans with a deductible, you pay the full cost of health care services first – essentially as if you did not have health insurance – until your total spending reaches the deductible amount. Once you reach that threshold, your insurance will start paying for your additional medical costs.

But in most plans, even once you hit your deductible, your insurance will still not cover the full cost of your care. You will continue to pay a portion of the bill through coinsurance, which is the percentage of the cost of care that you are responsible for paying. For example, if your coinsurance rate is 20 percent and you receive care that costs $500, you would pay $100 (20 percent of $500).

What often makes coinsurance confusing is that while the coinsurance rate – the percentage – is usually listed on your health insurance card, you still need to know the total cost of your care to calculate how much you will owe. That cost is difficult to know in advance because reliable health care prices are difficult to find and health care needs – and the services required to treat them – can be unpredictable.

Then there are copayments. This is a fixed amount you pay for a health care encounter, such as $20 for a primary care visit or $150 for an emergency department visit. In everyday language, people sometimes use copay to refer to any amount a patient pays out of pocket. Technically, however, a copayment refers only to a fixed fee paid for a health care service.

Whether through deductibles, coinsurance or copayments, these out-of-pocket amounts can add up quickly. To protect patients, especially those who need a lot of care and could otherwise face devastating medical bills, federal regulations require health insurers to limit how much patients can be asked to pay out of pocket each year for covered services.

This amount is called the out-of-pocket maximum. This is sometimes also called the out-of-pocket cap or out-of-pocket limit. Once your total out-of-pocket spending reaches that limit, your insurance must pay 100 percent of the cost of additional covered services for the rest of the year.

Additional factors to consider

These insurance rules can become even more complicated. Many plans have multiple different deductible amounts, coinsurance rates, copayments and even out-of-pocket maximums, depending on several factors. For example, in family plans, each person may have their own deductible or out-of-pocket maximum, but there may also be thresholds and limits that apply to the family as a whole. Cost-sharing can also vary by the type of care you receive. For instance, inpatient hospital care may be subject to a different set of cost-sharing rules than outpatient care.

Another important factor is whether your health care provider has a contract with your insurance company. Providers who have such a contract are called in-network providers. Those who do not are called out-of-network providers. Some insurance plans further divide in-network providers into tiers.

Providers in Tier 1 are the most preferred by the insurance plan, often because they agreed to provide services at relatively lower prices. Other in-network providers may be placed in Tier 2. Costs to you tend to be lowest for services from Tier 1 providers, higher for services from Tier 2 providers and highest for services from out-of-network providers. Some insurance plans may not cover out-of-network care at all.

There are often trade-offs between these elements – low premiums look great on the face of it, but any money you save by paying lower premiums is often offset by significant out-of-pocket costs, limited options for in-network providers, or both.

The problem, of course, is that it's impossible to predict how much health care you might need. If you could somehow know you weren't going to need much health care in the following year, then a low-premium, high-deductible plan would make sense.

If, on the other hand, you knew you were going to receive a catastrophic diagnosis or be in a life-altering car accident, you would want to opt for a plan that might include higher premiums but lower copays.

Gambles and trade-offs

If everyone knew all the medical care they needed could be provided by any general doctor, they might not care much about what or who was in-network. But if they knew they were going to need specialist surgery for a rare type of tumor, for example, offered at only one center out of state, they would want to consider what counts as in-network – or the costs of going out of network – in substantially more detail.

In many other countries, people don't face the same burden. In nations with universal health coverage, understanding health insurance jargon isn't a matter of financial survival. Because coverage is guaranteed, people do not have to agonize every year over choosing a health plan based on countless variables.

But until meaningful change comes about in the U.S., the best many Americans can do is understand health insurance jargon so they can choose plans that work best for them.

Jamie Hartmann-Boyce is an assistant professor of health promotion and policy and Michal Horný is an assistant professor of health policy and management at UMass Amherst. The Conversation is an independent and nonprofit source of news, analysis and commentary from academic experts. This article is republished under a Creative Commons license. Read the original article at https://theconversation.com.

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Wellness center offers free preventive health services for area residents

By MAXWELL HARDEN
max.harden@leaderpub.com

Maxwell Harden / Leader Publications

NILES — A local neighborhood wellness center continues to provide community members with preventative health care and referral services at no cost.

The neighborhood wellness center located at Hope Community Church, 2390 Lake St., Niles, is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays and from noon to 7 p.m. on Fridays. Sponsored by a collaboration between the Wayne State University Community Health Worker Academy and Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, the center offers a variety of services including blood pressure screenings, cholesterol screenings, diabetes screenings and COVID-19 and flu testing. No ID, insurance or appointments are required.

"These are the type of labs that we do," Said Site Lead Sara Palmer. "We don't take a big sample; it's just a finger poke. If you need weekly blood pressure monitoring – like your doctor says you should be managing blood pressure, but you don't want to go to Walgreens because the line's long or the machine fails – get it done here for free. We're not gonna tell you no; come every day."

In addition to the screenings, a community health worker is on site to offer in-person support by referring community members to resources that cater to their health and well-being.

"We work together," said Community Health Worker KC Johnson. "They do the testing, and then if people need social service type things, I can help fill in the gaps with understanding healthcare or applying for Medicaid. Sometimes seniors come in and need help understanding Medicare, knowing when to get on it, and how to work all those kinds of things. I have people come in that might need help finding housing or food assistance, so I get them connected with different resources in the community. Sometimes, people just need to talk. I have people that come in on a regular basis that don't understand letters from MDHHS; I can help decode that stuff and help upload documents. I have people come in that need help with getting a new roof. I'll help them with applications for the City of Niles, so it can really be any kind of need. I just dig out all kinds of resources for folks."

Both Palmer and Johnson hope that more people take advantage of the services the neighborhood wellness service provides.

"It's a big deal because everybody that comes and finds out about us gets services that help them in a great way," Johnson said. "Whether people need to get signed up for benefits or need help getting their bills paid and don't know how to find resources on their own, just knowing there's a place they can come to helps them. I'm not saying it's life-changing, but it actually really is. There's a gentleman that comes – he's a repeat visitor because he knows he can come here and get help. Without knowing how to navigate resources on their own, people can just feel stuck.

"We had a guy come in here whose blood pressure was so high that they had to send him to the hospital," Johnson continued. "From coming in here and seeing how high it was – he could have stroked out – he ended up changing his whole regimen. He changed his diet, started eating healthier, and managing his weight. Those are the kind of impacts being made here. People need to know we're here."

"We don't need anything but you; you're the important part," Palmer added. "A lot of people feel inferior because they think, 'Well, I have insurance. It's not for me, it's for lower income.' No, this is for everybody. Anybody who feels a part of our community, come."

Health Is Wealth Fair set for March 26

By MAXWELL HARDEN
max.harden@leaderpub.com

NILES — Local and state organizations are teaming up to provide free health and wellness support to the community.

Everyday Life Consulting, Hope Community Church and the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services are gearing up to present the Health Is Wealth Fair next week.

The fair will take place from 1 to 6 p.m. Thursday, March 26 at Hope Community Church, 2390 Lake St., Niles. Attendees are encouraged to come early for a chance to enter to win various prizes. The free event aims to provide the community with essential wellness tools for families and individuals. No registration required to attend.

"This fair is about getting people excited about being invested in their own health, understanding how they can better manage it and giving them resources to do that," said Community Health Worker KC Johnson.

Visitors can participate in a wide variety of interactive outreach services, including Live Zumba sessions and live juicing demonstrations. There will also be nutrition services featuring healthy, diabetic-friendly food demonstrations. Additionally, the fair will host career services to support local professional growth and community development.

"We're doing a juicing demo to show people how to juice. There are a lot of fun giveaways; people like to get free stuff. That's just to make it fun," Johnson said. "We're going to have Zumba going on; it's going to be fun."

The fair will also offer free health screenings and information. Medical professionals and experts will be on-site to provide screenings for blood pressure, diabetes (A1C), and cholesterol. Information and resources will also be available covering mental and behavioral health, women's and men's health, weight management and vaccinations.

"Social well-being and nutritional health – we'll have everything that hits those topics," Johnson said. "We have folks coming from Corewell to do a nutritional demo, teaching diabetics how to make and create diabetic-friendly meals. The Berrien County Health Department will be here with their parenting program and talking about some of their other programs. We have folks from Nora Mental Health, Area Agency on Aging – just from A to Z, all kinds of social services, physical health, and mental health."

Johnson has enjoyed her role in putting the fair together and hopes the community will take advantage of it.

"Just getting everybody together has been exciting," she said. "As I've been working with everyone to do this, I've been making connections with different partners in the community to pull it all together in one space. We don't have a hub where we can get all-inclusive information and just come together for one thing. I think we need it. It's evident because the community showed up when I put out the call. Everybody said, 'Yeah.' I don't think anybody we reached out to said they couldn't do it. That just goes to show that we needed it."

BHS awarded MiSTEM Playbook Mini Grant

By PMG STAFF

File photo
Buchanan High School will receive a MISTEM Network Playbook Mini Grant from the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity.

BUCHANAN — Buchanan Community Schools announced Friday that Buchanan High School has been selected as a recipient of the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity's MISTEM Network Playbook Mini Grant.

The MISTEM Playbook program is a collaborative effort involving General Motors, Michigan State University, Beyond Consulting, and MTEC SmartZone. In the first phase of an expanded $1.75 million initiative, $800,000 has been awarded to 17 public education agencies across the state. In addition to the direct award, Buchanan educators will receive professional learning and instructional support from MSU College of Education.

The grant honors the dedication of BHS Science Teacher Melissa Frost, whose efforts in securing the funding will bring educational opportunities to Buchanan students. The project focuses on the collaborative development of schoolyard ecological monitoring across Michigan. By establishing a student-led, cross-district network, the district facilitates the collection and exchange of environmental data to investigate how campus landscapes contribute to both biodiversity and community well-being. The initiative, supported by a significant $1 million contribution from General Motors, is designed to expand Place-, Project, and Problem-based STEM learning.

The funding will allow Frost and the BHS Science department to integrate real-world problem solving into the classroom, moving beyond traditional lectures to immersive, hands-on experiences.

"We are incredibly proud of Melissa Frost for her vision and commitment to our students," said Patricia Robinson, Superintendent of Buchanan Community Schools. "Being selected from such a competitive pool of applicants speaks of the quality of instruction at Buchanan High School. This grant ensures our students are not just learning about science, they are acting as the engineers and innovators of tomorrow."

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Bobcats fall to Titans

Photos by Nick Shelton / For Leader Publications

Brandywine Head Coach Josh Hood relays instructions too Lily Gill (11) during the Division 3 state semifinal game Thursday at the Breslin Center.

Slow start hinders Brandywine in state semifinal loss to Lumen Christi

By SCOTT HASSINGER
Leader Correspondent

EAST LANSING — Pressure defense, forcing turnovers and using its depth to wear down opponents.

That was Brandywine's recipe for girls' basketball success in the first 27 games this season.

Unfortunately, Jackson Lumen Christi was able to turn the table on top-ranked Brandywine in Thursday's Division 3 state semifinal game at the Breslin Center at Michigan State University in a 51-33 win over the Lady Bobcats.

Lumen Christi (24-3) advances to face Pewamo-Westphalia (26-2) in Saturday's 4 p.m. championship game. It will mark the Titans' first ever appearance in the finals.

Pewamo-Westphalia defeated Roscommon 44-35 in the other semifinal.

Brandywine finishes with a record of 26-2 after appearing in its third consecutive Final Four.

Lumen Christi used an intense full-court pressure to disrupt Brandywine's offensive flow and forced the Lady Bobcats into an uncharacteristic 23 turnovers on the afternoon.

"We played lights out the first 10 minutes of this game and made shots. This team is more than just two players. I thought that especially early on we won the 50/50 balls. I have all the confidence in the world in these girls," said Lumen Christi's first-year head coach Scott Stine.

Stine formerly coached at Ypsilanti Arbor Prep, which knocked Brandywine out two of the last three seasons. Stine won three out of the last four state titles while at Arbor Prep.

The defensive chaos the Lady Titans were able to create limited the Lady Bobcats to just 34 total shots.

Brandywine finished the day shooting 12-of-34 (35.2 percent) from the floor and 11-for-24 (45.8 percent) at the foul stripe. Lumen Christi launched twice as many shots and made 24-of-66 (36.3 percent) field-goal attempts and made 6-of-12 (50 percent) free-throw tries.

Lumen Christi's aggressive press forced Brandywine into nine turnovers in the opening quarter. The Titans raced out to a 14-0 advantage before the Lady Bobcats finally managed its first basket on a close-range jumper from Mackenna Price with 2:53 left in the first quarter. Karleigh Byrd's charity toss was the only other point Brandywine could rummage up the remainder of the period as Lumen Christi increased its lead to 18-3 entering the second quarter.

See **LOSS**, page B2

Brandywine's Zaya Price (4) attempts a basket while defended by Lumen Christi's Kenna Hunt (1) Thursday during Division 3 state semifinal play at the Breslin Center.

'These girls are champions'

EAST LANSING — For the third straight year, the Bobcats earned a trip to the Breslin Center for a chance to win a state title, and for the third straight year, a Scott Stine-coached team stood in their way. The Stine-led Lumen Christi Titans defeated the Bobcats Thursday night in the Division 3 state semifinals at the Breslin Center.

Stine led Ann Arbor Prep to three state titles in four seasons before taking the Lumen Christi job during the offseason.

Maxwell Harden

"I was kidding with [coach Stine] before the game; I told him I'm going to start calling him "Coach Kryptonite," Hood said. "He's a phenomenal coach. Not only does he have talent, but they play really good basketball. That's why he wins where he's at."

The first quarter set the down for the game as the Titans dialed up the pressure and forced turnovers that led to points on offense, not unlike what Brandywine had done to opponents all season long.

"I think we had to look in the mirror for a minute and realize how fast and athletic they are," Hood said. "We don't shy away from anyone; we're in the top 20 of the state for MPR every year. We try to play the Kalamazoo Centrals and the Otsegos to put these girls in tough situations, but you can't simulate walking into the Breslin Center with the big lights."

Hood said that while the slow start was disappointing, he was impressed with the way his team continued to compete. After being outscored 18-3 in the first quarter, the Bobcats were able to keep pace with the Titans the rest of the way.

"We aren't used to turning the ball over that much, especially three times in a row," he said. "We have a lot of new faces and lost seven seniors from last year's team. Although we have experience, we don't have a ton of it because of the new roster. After that slow start, I was proud that we didn't throw in the towel at halftime. We came out and battled. That's what these girls do."

Hood was proud of the way his team competed against a Lumen Christi squad led by sophomores Kenna Hunt and Lucy Wrozek, two players destined for Division 1 college rosters. While the Bobcats did their best to contain them, players like Lily Ganton and Tristin Johnson were able to take advantage offensively.

"They're tough to defend," Hood said. "My girls said, 'Let's do it,' so we tried to take the head off the snake, hoping the movement wouldn't be as good, but their movement was great even with us trying to take out [Hunt] and [Wrozek]. They're the full package. But how about the way we competed? We camped in during the second half and I'm proud of the girls."

See **HARDEN**, page B2

Roadrunners earn awards for basketball

By MAXWELL HARDEN
max.harden@leaderpub.com

DOWAGIAC — Four SMC men's basketball players recently received a total of eight end-of-season awards as announced by the MCCAA and NJCAA Region XII.

Sophomore Davion Goins was named to the MCCAA Western Conference All-Defensive Team and was named Western Defensive Player of the Year. Goins also earned spots on the Western Conference First Team, All-MCCAA and NJCAA All-Region XII Team.

Sophomore Damontae May and freshman Deuce Weston earned Honorable Mentions in the Western Conference and freshman Jovohn Ratliff was named to the Western Conference Third Team.

A former Cassopolis standout, Goins averaged 17.7 points per game on 53.6 percent shooting from the field and led the team in both rebounds per game 8.3 and steals (39). He also tallied 72 assists and 16 blocks.

Ratliff was the team's leading scorer, averaging 18.7 points per game on a team-best 52.8 percent 3-point shooting and 53.9 percent shooting overall. Weston averaged 10.3 points per game on 45.7 percent shooting from the floor while ranking second on the team with 105 total assists.

May averaged 8.9 points and 4.6 rebounds per game while leading the team with 146 assists. He also ranked second on the team with 37 steals.

Photo provided

SMC's Davion Goins (2) was named MCCAA Western Conference Defensive Player of the Year.

Top-seeded Michigan rolls past Howard

By JOHN WAWROW
Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Morez Johnson Jr. had 21 points and 10 rebounds on a perfect shooting night, and No. 1 seed Michigan rode a second-half surge to a 101-81 victory over 16th-seeded Howard in the first round of the NCAA Tournament on Thursday.

Towering center Aday Mara had 19 points, seven rebounds and six assists for a Wolverines team that set the Big Ten regular-season record with 19 conference victories. Johnson shot 8 of 8 from the field as Michigan (32-3) moved within one win of matching a program record set in 2017-18.

Top-seeded teams improved to 160-2 against No. 16 seeds, with Duke outlasting Siena earlier in the day.

Duke's struggles – the Blue Devils won 72-65 after trailing by 13 points – were top of mind for the Wolverines before tipoff.

"A 16-1 game, you kind of look at them like this should be a cakewalk, but that's just really never the case," said Roddy Gayle Jr., who scored 14 points. "Every team deserves to be here, and you can't look at any team like that."

Michigan advanced to play ninth-seeded Saint Louis (29-5) on Saturday.

Cam Gillus and Bryce Harris scored 21 points each, and Cedrick Taylor had 19 points and six rebounds for Howard (24-11). The Bison were playing two days after their 86-83 win over UMBC in the First Four at Dayton, Ohio, on Tuesday – the program's first March Madness victory in six appearances.

Michigan's depth and relentless, come-from-anywhere attacking style eventually overwhelmed Howard – though it took the Wolverines a while to get rolling. Howard's 46 points in the first half were the third most by a 16 seed against a 1 seed in tournament history, and the most since Florida A&M scored 52 in a 96-76 loss to Kentucky in 2004.

"We have a lot of respect for Howard," said Wolverines coach Dusty May, before citing the book "David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants" by Malcolm Gladwell.

"David and Goliath, according to Malcolm, wasn't necessarily an upset because there was a slingshot involved. In the first half, Howard had their slingshots out," May said. "We thought we took a haymaker from them in the first half. And our guys never played scared."

After the Bison cut the lead to 50-48 on Ose Okojie's drive into the paint 14 seconds into the second half, Michigan began to pull away, eventually building a 77-59 edge on Gayle's 3-pointer 7:30 into the period.

Howard's 3-point shooting went cold. After hitting 11 of their first 17 attempts, the Bison finished 14 of 29.

Otherwise, the Bison showed little fear in the face of a daunting challenge.

"You play the game to win. We're just as talented as they are," said Harris, a fifth-year senior. "We have talent, too. I feel like we showed that in the first half for sure."

Harris then turned his attention to the Wolverines.

"Big shoutout to Michigan; they're a great team. It could have been very easy for them to – like other past teams that have been upset – to totally dismantle," he said. "Kudos to them. That's the sign of a good team."

Fans get peek at upset

Once the Wolverines opened a 20-plus-point lead, the crowd in Buffalo was more interested in watching the double-box broadcast on the scoreboard and cheering on the final minute of VCU's 82-78 win over North Carolina.

Gayle comes up big

Gayle is from nearby Niagara Falls, and the Michigan senior played with plenty of family and friends in the stands.

Jeffrey T. Barnes / AP

Michigan forward Morez Johnson Jr. (21) dunks against Howard, on Thursday in Buffalo, N.Y.

"I tried my hardest to not look in that direction. I'm focused on the game plan," the backup guard said. "But at the end of the day when you hear the crowd erupt, all the nerves and the stress just kind of lift away. You just play free."

Blakeney says goodbye

Howard coach Kenneth Blakeney was emotional as he bid farewell to Harris and Okojie, seniors who made it to March Madness three times in four seasons.

"I can't express how grateful I am for these guys. They've been unbelievable people, people that I would do anything for," Blakeney said. "I'm so proud of these guys, and I love them so much."

Michigan State slams North Dakota State

By JONAH BRONSTEIN
Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Carson Cooper matched his career high with 20 points and grabbed 10 rebounds as Michigan State routed North Dakota State 92-67 on Thursday to reach the second round of the NCAA Tournament for the 22nd time in 28 consecutive appearances under coach Tom Izzo.

Coen Carr added 17 points for the third-seeded Spartans. Freshman forward Cam Ward scored 13 points and Jaxon Kohler had 12 points and nine rebounds. Leading scorer Jeremy Fears Jr. managed only seven points, but had 11 assists, exceeding his season average of 9.2 that ranks first in the country.

Michigan State (26-7) advanced to play Louisville (24-10) in the second round Saturday after the No. 6 seed in the Midwest held on to beat South Florida 83-79. It will be the fifth March Madness matchup between the schools and first since 2015, when the Spartans beat the Cardinals in overtime to reach the Final Four.

The Spartans bounced back after losing in the first round of the Big Ten tournament against UCLA, and in their regular-season finale at Michigan.

"When we're clicking, I think we're really hard to beat," Fears said. "And day in and day out, it's a grind to keep getting better, and the end goal is to win championships. We want to win games, but championships is the goal.

Damari Wheeler-Thomas scored 16 points to lead 14th-seeded North Dakota State (27-8). The Summit League champions qualified for the NCAA Tournament for the sixth time in 18 seasons and first since the 2020 tournament that was canceled.

The Spartans shot 59 percent against the undersized Bison, scoring 44 points in the paint, with eight dunks. Michigan State shot 10 for 20 from 3-point range, while North Dakota State finished 6 for 25 from long distance.

"When you start making baskets, I think you get fooled that you can win games different ways," Izzo said. "You can win them different ways, but to win consistently, where you've got to come in night in, night out, play in different arenas, domes, this arena, pro arenas, you'd better bring your lunch bucket and your defense and your rebounding."

The Spartans had a 35-23 advantage on the boards and did not allow any second-chance baskets.

North Dakota State opened an early 8-5 lead before going more than six minutes without a field goal. Michigan State took command with an 18-2 run. The Spartans extended their lead with a 10-point run and led 45-25 at halftime.

Steady March

Michigan State improved to 51-26 in the tournament under Izzo during what is the longest active streak of March Madness appearances. The Spartans have not lost their opening game since playing in the First Four in 2019, and have not lost as the higher seed in a first-round matchup since 2016.

"We're blessed to have someone who's been through the ringer for 28 years straight in this tournament," Cooper said of Izzo. "It's comfortable for us to kind of look up to him and trust what he's telling us because we know he's been there."

Yuki Iwamura / AP

Michigan State forward Cameron Ward (3) dunks against North Dakota State on Thursday in Buffalo, N.Y.

Passing fancy

Michigan State's 26 assists were its most ever in an NCAA Tournament game.

Fears had double-digit assists for the 14th time this season. The Spartans scored 15 points in transition, with Fears lobbing a number of alley-oops to Cooper and Carr on the fast break

"I could care less if we run any plays," Izzo said. "I'd like to just get our fast break going and make that the biggest part of our offense."

Up next

Michigan State will try to reach the Sweet 16 for the 17th time under Izzo.

HARDEN

From page B1

Hood does not like to talk about himself or his accomplishments, instead giving the credit to his team and coaching staff. The results are hard to ignore. Brandywine is 100-8 over the last four seasons, believed to be the third-most wins over a four-season period in MHSAA history. Seniors Karleigh Byrd and Macy Pellow were a part of all 100 wins over that stretch and exit the program as the winningest players in southwest Michigan history.

"I couldn't have asked for a better school to play for," Byrd said. "I don't think we give [coach Hood] enough credit for how much he does for us – he's up at 3 a.m. watching film. Also, the girls, I've known them all my life. They buy in, they want to win, and they fought hard. Even the players who didn't get in the game were always encouraging. I couldn't ask for a better place to be."

What Hood has been able to build here at Brandywine is historic and should be appreciated. While the outcome was not what they had hoped for, Hood and the Bobcats are determined to break through and bring a state title back to the Bobcat den.

"This little community of Brandywine being here three times in a row is very impressive," Hood said. "You saw them battle. It's hard to get here, and we've done it three times in a row. It's hard to get over the top and we're still working at that, but these girls are champions. We're not just chasing rings; we're building champions."

LOSS

From page B1

"Kudos to Jackson Lumen Christi. Scott Stine is a phenomenal coach and they have a great team. We got off to a rough start and it's very difficult to contain Kenna Hunt and Lucy Wrozek. There's a reason why those two are Division I prospects. Kenna is probably the leading candidate right now for the 2028 Miss Basketball Award because I just voted for her. I'm proud of our girls for not packing it in after the first half," said Brandywine head coach Josh Hood.

"We lost seven seniors off last year's team. So even though we had that experience of being here we didn't have a ton of experience. There are a lot of new faces on our team this year playing new roles. Being here three years in a row is pretty impressive for a small school like ours. It's hard to get here. We play a tough schedule, but it's difficult to simulate playing in the big lights of the Breslin Center. These girls are champions though and great people."

Lumen Christi outscored Brandywine 11-7 during the second quarter to increase the Titans' lead to 29-10 at intermission. Lucy Wrozek scored six of the Titans' points in that period. Brandywine did a bit better making its shots, getting a layup and free throw from Lily Gill and two buckets inside from freshman Zaya Price.

The Titans took advantage of three layups and its perimeter shooting to outscore the Bobcats 15-12 in the third quarter. The Bobcats scored a majority of their points in the stanza off 8-of-12 free-throw shooting.

Lumen Christi took a 43-22 advantage over Brandywine into the fourth quarter.

Brandywine was unable to get any closer than 17 points on a pair of occasions during the fourth quarter. Brook Brumitt's three pointer (45-28) and a bucket inside from Zaya Price were as close as the Bobcats would get.

Photos by Nick Shelton / For Leader Publications

Lily Gill (11) pushes the ball up the floor while Lumen Christy's Lucy Wrozek (14) and Kenna Hunt (1) give chase.{/span}

Lumen Christi's all-state sophomore point guard Kenna Hunt was a tough matchup all day for Brandywine. Hunt finished the game with 16 points, seven rebounds, eight assists and one blocked shot. Senior Lily Ganton contributed 13 points and six rebounds for the Lady Titans and Wrozek added 10 points and four boards. Tristin Johnson added seven points, Ruby Boyce had five rebounds and Erin O'Dowd tallied four.

Zaya Price paced Brandywine with 18 points, nine rebounds, three assists and one blocked shot. Mackenna Price chipped in with 10 points and three rebounds. Lily Gill contributed seven points for the Lady Bobcats and Byrd added three points, three assists and two rebounds.

"We always know that if we can't get our offense going our defense will boost us. I think that we always just try to play together. We don't always give Coach Hood enough credit for what he does for us. Sometimes he's up at 3 a.m. watching film. I've known these girls all my life and they buy in, they fight hard and are always encouraging," said Gill reflecting on her four years in the program.

Lumen Christi also won the rebounding battle over Brandywine 28-20.

The contest was the final one for Brandywine's five seniors Macy Pellow, Sydney Olson, Makenzii Myer, Byrd and Brie Reese who won over 100 games during their varsity careers.

JACKSON LUMEN CHRISTI 51, BRANDYWINE 33

BRANDYWINE (33)
Karleigh Byrd 0 3-10 3, Zaya Price 7 3-4 18, Mackenna Price 1 0-2 2, Lily Gill 1 5-8 7, Brook Brumitt 1 0-0 3. Totals: 10 11-24 33.
LUMEN CHRISTI (51)
Kenna Hunt 7 2-4 16, Lily Ganton 5 0-0 13, Lucy Wrozek 4 2-2 10, Roby Boyce 1 0-0 2, Paige Lefere 1 1-4 3, Tristin Johnson 3 1-2 7. Totals: 21 6-12 51.

Brandywine	3	7	15	8	— 33
Lumen Christi	18	11	15	7	— 51

3-point goals – Brandywine 2 (Z. Price, Brumitt), Lumen Christi 3 (Ganton 3). Total fouls – Brandywine 9, Lumen Christi 17. Fouled out – none. Technical fouls – none.
Records – Brandywine 26-2, Lumen Christi 24-3.

Brandywine's Lily Gill (11) attempts a basket over a Lumen Christi defender during Thursday's Division 3 state semifinal game at the Breslin Center.

Three-peat chase

Ohtani, Dodgers try for a rare MLB feat as labor strife looms

BY JAY COHEN
AP SPORTS WRITER

MLB PREVIEW

It has been 26 years since a major league team won three consecutive World Series titles. That's the big challenge for Shohei Ohtani and the Los Angeles Dodgers this year.

Ohtani and company are bidding for baseball's first three-peat since the New York Yankees ruled the majors from 1998 to 2000. And the Dodgers might be better than ever before after adding closer Edwin Díaz and All-Star outfielder Kyle Tucker in free agency.

"When you're a Dodger, people want to take us down," manager Dave Roberts told his team during spring training. "They want to beat us, and I said it earlier, is it's a Game 7. So I think that we've got to look ahead and say that this is going to be harder than it's ever been."

It was hard last year, too. The Dodgers were pushed by the Toronto Blue Jays all the way to extra innings in Game 7 before they secured the franchise's third championship in six years and No. 9 overall.

The Blue Jays are among the Dodgers' top challengers once again this season after signing Dylan Cease in free agency. The list of championship contenders also includes Garrett Crochet and the Boston Red Sox and Alex Bregman and the Chicago Cubs, to go along with the Seattle Mariners, New York Yankees and New York Mets.

Here are a few more storylines for the 2026 season:

ROBOT UMPIRES HAVE ARRIVED

The Automated Ball/Strike system — aka robot umpires — is going to be used in major league regular-season games for the first time. Human umpires will still call balls and strikes, but teams can challenge two calls per game and use additional appeals in extra innings. Challenges must be made by a pitcher, catcher or batter — signaled by tapping their helmet or cap — and a team retains its challenge if successful. Reviews will be shown as digital graphics on outfield videoboards.

AP PHOTO

The Automated Ball/Strike System plays on the scoreboard after a pitch call was challenged.

AP PHOTO

New York Yankees' Aaron Judge hits a home run June 11, 2025, in Kansas City, Mo.

The strategy surrounding how teams use their challenges and who has clearance to appeal will be closely watched throughout the season.

OLD FACES AT NEW PLACES

After seven seasons and 264 homers — many of the titanic variety — Pete Alonso left the Mets in December for a $155 million, five-year contract with the Baltimore Orioles.

The slugging first baseman is hoping to power Baltimore back to the playoffs after it finished last in the AL East last season.

After Alonso departed, the Mets signed infielder Bo Bichette in free agency and traded for outfielder Luis Robert Jr. and pitcher Freddy Peralta. Bichette spent his first seven seasons with Toronto, and Robert moved on after six seasons with the Chicago White Sox. Peralta played for the Milwaukee Brewers for eight years before the trade.

Justin Verlander also has a new team. Well, sort of. The 43-year-old right-hander is back in Detroit after agreeing to a $13 million, one-year contract.

The three-time Cy Young Award winner went 183-114 with a 3.49 ERA while spending his first 12-plus seasons with the Tigers.

MILESTONE WATCH

Five sluggers are approaching 400 career homers. Yankees star Aaron Judge is up to 368 after the three-time AL MVP swatted 53 homers last year. Teammate Paul Goldschmidt is at 372, followed by San Diego Padres third baseman Manny Machado (369). First basemen Freddie Freeman (367) of the Dodgers and Bryce Harper (363) of the Philadelphia Phillies also are in the mix.

Kenley Jansen, who signed with the Detroit Tigers in December, needs 24 saves to become the third member of the 500 saves club, joining Mariano Rivera and Trevor Hoffman.

LABOR STRIFE

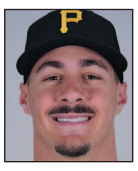
The collective bargaining agreement between Major League Baseball and the players' association expires Dec. 1, and the potential of another work stoppage is expected to hover over the sport throughout the 2026 season.

It looks as if management is likely to propose a salary cap, something that traditionally has been a red line for the union.

Rookies To Watch

Nick Kurtz and Drake Baldwin made a smooth transition to the major leagues last season. Kurtz was rewarded with the AL Rookie of the Year award, and Baldwin took home the NL honor. Here is a closer look at some of the rookies looking to have a similar impact this year:

PITTSBURGH PIRATES INFIELDER
Konnor Griffin



Widely regarded as the majors' top prospect, Griffin could make a push for Pittsburgh's second NL Rookie of the Year award in three seasons after Paul Skenes won in 2024. Griffin, a Mississippi native who turns 20 on April 24, hit .333 with 21 homers, 94 RBIs and 65 steals over three minor league stops last year. The shortstop was taken by the Pirates with the No. 9 pick in the 2024 amateur draft.

ST. LOUIS CARDINALS INFIELDER
JJ Wetherholt

St. Louis is working on a rare rebuild for the franchise, and Wetherholt's development is worth watching in terms of how long it might last. The 23-year-old infielder played college ball for West Virginia before he was selected by the Cardinals with the No. 7 pick in the 2024 amateur draft. He batted .306 with 17 homers, 59 RBIs and 23 steals over two minor league stops last year, finishing the season with Triple-A Memphis.

TORONTO BLUE JAYS PITCHER
Trey Yesavage

Yesavage, a 6-foot-4 right-hander with an unusual arm slot, helped Toronto reach the World Series in 2025. He went 3-1 with a 3.58 ERA in six postseason appearances, striking out 39 and walking 11 in 27 2/3 innings. Yesavage began last season at Class A Dunedin and posted a 5-1 record with a 3.12 ERA over four minor league stops before making his Blue Jays debut on Sept. 15.

BALTIMORE ORIOLES CATCHER
Samuel Basallo

Baltimore has quite the catching tandem with Adley Rutschman and Basallo, who made his major league debut in August. Basallo batted just .165 with four homers in 31 games with the Orioles, but he hit .270 with 23 homers and 67 RBIs in 76 games with Triple-A Norfolk. Rutschman remains the No. 1 catcher, but the 21-year-old Basallo also will see time at first base and designated hitter.

NEW YORK METS PITCHER
Nolan McLean

McLean was terrific in his first stint with New York last year, going 5-1 with a 2.06 ERA in eight starts. The 6-foot-2 right-hander, a third-round pick in the 2023 amateur draft out of Oklahoma State University, also struck out 57 in 48 innings. He is expected to be a key member of New York's rotation this season as the Mets try to rebound from a tough finish last year.

DETROIT TIGERS INFIELDER
Kevin McGonigle

The 21-year-old McGonigle was taken by Detroit with the No. 37 pick in the 2023 amateur draft. The shortstop batted .305 with 19 homers, 80 RBIs and 10 steals in 88 games over three minor league stops last year. He could play a major role for a Tigers team looking to contend for the AL Central title.

AP CONTENT BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
DESIGN BY ADAMS PUBLISHING GROUP/PAGINATION CENTER

Games to Watch

Mexico City is on the major league schedule. Same for the Field of Dreams in Iowa, and Historic Bowman Field in Pennsylvania. Here are some dates to remember for the upcoming season:

Opening day: Wednesday, March 25

New York Yankees at San Francisco Giants: The 2026 season begins with Aaron Judge and Co. visiting Rafael Devers and San Francisco for Tony Vitello's first game as Giants manager. Judge won his third AL MVP award last year, but the slugger remains in search of his first World Series championship. Vitello takes over a San Francisco team that has made just one playoff appearance since 2017. Devers anchors Vitello's lineup in his first full season with the Giants after he was acquired in a trade with Boston.

World Series rematch: Monday, April 6

Los Angeles Dodgers at Toronto Blue Jays: Shohei Ohtani leads Los Angeles into Toronto for its first matchup with the Blue Jays since their epic World Series in the fall. Ohtani and Co. are going for their third consecutive championship after outlasting Toronto in seven games last year. The Dodgers added Kyle Tucker and Edwin Díaz in free agency, and the Blue Jays bolstered their rotation by signing right-handers Dylan Cease and Cody Ponce. Infielder Kazuma Okamoto also came over from Japan.

Mexico City Series: Saturday, April 25

San Diego Padres at Arizona Diamondbacks: Manny Machado and the Padres face Geraldo Perdomo and the Diamondbacks in the first of two games at Mexico City's Estadio Alfredo Harp Helú. San Diego went 8-5 against Arizona last year on its way to a 90-72 record and an NL wild card. The Diamondbacks are hoping to return to the playoffs for the first time since they lost to Texas in the 2023 World Series.

All-Star Game: Tuesday, July 14

Philadelphia's Citizens Bank Park hosts the All-Star Game for the first time as the United States celebrates its 250th anniversary. The All-Star Game also was played in Philly at Veterans Stadium in 1996 and 1976, and at Shibe Park in 1952 and 1943. The NL beat the AL last year in Atlanta when Kyle Schwarber homered three times in the first All-Star Game swing-off.

Field of Dreams: Thursday, Aug. 13

Philadelphia Phillies at Minnesota Twins: Bryce Harper and the Phillies take on Byron Buxton and the Twins in Major League Baseball's third "Field of Dreams" game. The iconic site in eastern Iowa served as the home of the 1989 movie starring Kevin Costner and James Earl Jones. The White Sox beat the Yankees 9-8 in the first game in Dyersville in 2021, and the Cubs knocked off the Reds 4-2 in the second edition in 2022.

MLB Little League Classic: Sunday, Aug. 23

Atlanta Braves at Milwaukee Brewers: Ronald Acuña Jr. and Jackson Chourio look to put on a show as the Braves face the Brewers at Historic Bowman Field in the finale of a weekend series. Returning from a torn ACL, Acuña hit .290 with 21 homers and 42 RBIs in 95 games for the Braves last year. Chourio helped lead the Brewers to the NL Central title last season, batting .270 with 21 homers, 78 RBIs and 21 steals in 131 games.

Alonso returns: Monday, Sept. 14

Baltimore Orioles at New York Mets: Slugging first baseman Pete Alonso plays his first game at Citi Field since signing a $155 million, five-year contract with the Orioles in December. The 31-year-old Alonso was drafted by New York and swatted 264 homers for the Mets in seven seasons before departing in free agency. In one dizzying stretch in January, the revamped Mets traded for Freddy Peralta and Luis Robert Jr. and signed infielder Bo Bichette to a $126 million, three-year deal.

Playoff implications? Sunday, Sept. 27

Chicago Cubs at Boston Red Sox: Chicago and Boston begin the year with World Series aspirations, and they finish the regular season at Fenway Park. Alex Bregman hit .273 with 18 homers and 62 RBIs in his lone season with the Red Sox before signing a $175 million, five-year contract with the Cubs in free agency. Led by Garrett Crochet, Ranger Suárez and Sonny Gray, the Red Sox have one of the majors' best rotations.

Marquee Sports Network reaches agreement with Hulu, Amazon Prime to stream Cubs games

By MEGHAN MONTEMURRO
Chicago Tribune (TNS)

CHICAGO — Chicago Cubs fans will have more direct-to-consumer streaming options to watch games this year.

Marquee Sports Network has reached an agreement to expand its DTC footprint through two notable streaming services.

Starting Wednesday, Marquee is available for Hulu + Live TV subscribers. Additionally, Marquee can be streamed live on Amazon's Prime Video through a monthly subscription ($19.99) that will include Cubs games, pregame and postgame coverage and all other Marquee programming. Both DTC options are for in-market Cubs fans.

"We're committed to delivering world-class game broadcasts to our fans through our linear channel and our direct-to-consumer product," Cubs president of business operations Crane Kenney said in a statement. "By expanding our streaming distribution, we're providing more ways than ever to follow the Cubs all season long."

In January, Kenney told the Chicago Tribune the Cubs have more than 100,000 direct subscribers to Marquee since launching their DTC streaming option three years ago.

"It's changing, and it's changed because the number of cable subscribers has fallen off a cliff," Kenney said. "We're in the same boat as everyone else. Fortunately, Marquee stands alone, so we have to make smart decisions on how we spend our money. We made some decisions recently that were difficult. We'll continue to make decisions sometimes that will be difficult."

Within the last six months, those difficult decisions saw Marquee essentially shutter its digital online product after laying off multiple employees, shift to predominantly emphasizing its Cubs game production and air fewer spring training games this year. Marquee ultimately selected 11 Cactus League games to broadcast.

"A really hard decision, but it seemed like it made the most sense to us in terms of, like any budget, where do you want to cut and what do you want to emphasize?" Kenney said. "So we're going to emphasize the pre, the post and the games with the same technology, same talent, to give our fans the very best games. And we made that decision on spring training, we're going to do fewer."

Classifieds Marketplace

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0900 LEGALS

STATE OF MICHIGAN
PROBATE COURT
BERRIEN COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
Decedent's Estate

CASE NO. and JUDGE
2025-0841-DE-M

Estate of:
Walter Robert Whitmyer, Jr.
Date of birth: 07/03/1946

TO ALL CREDITORS: *

NOTICE TO CREDITORS: The decedent, Walter Robert Whitmyer, Jr., died 08/26/2025. Creditors of the decedent are notified that all claims against the estate will be forever barred unless presented to Taryn Weidner, personal representative, or to both the probate court at 1205 N. Front Street, Niles, MI 49120 and the personal representative within 4 months after the date of publication of this notice.

Date: 03/26/2026

Randall G. Hesser P36450
Attorney name Bar no.
861 Parkway Ave.
Address
Elkhart, IN 46516
City, state, zip
574-294-7491
Telephone

Taryn Weidner
Personal representative
28883 CR 10
Address
Elkhart, IN 46514
City, state, zip

STATE OF MICHIGAN
PROBATE COURT
CASS COUNTY

NOTICE TO CREDITORS
Decedent's Estate

CASE NO. and JUDGE
2026-056-DE
Hon. Carol M. Bealor

Estate of:
Howard Kenneth Miller
Date of birth: 02/01/1935

TO ALL CREDITORS: *

NOTICE TO CREDITORS: The decedent, Howard Kenneth Miller, died 01/28/2024. Creditors of the decedent are notified that all claims against the estate will be forever barred unless presented to Marcus Alan Carlson, personal representative, or to both the probate court at 60296 M62 St. 10, Cassopolis, MI 49031 and the personal representative within 4 months after the date of publication of this notice.

Date: 03/05/2026

Randall G. Hesser P36450
Attorney name Bar no.
861 Parkway Ave.
Address
Elkhart, IN 46516
City, state, zip
574-294-7491
Telephone

Marcus Alan Carlson
Personal representative
25595 US 12
Address
Edwardsburg, MI 49112
City, state, zip
269-663-9402
Telephone

Niles Community Schools is accepting bids for roof improvements at Ballard Elementary. Please contact Carmi Design Group at 269-663-5073 for the full bid documents.

0900 LEGALS

STATE OF MICHIGAN
PROBATE COURT
COUNTY OF Cass

PUBLICATION OF NOTICE AND CREDITORS NOTICE

FILE NO
2026-063-DE

ESTATE OF:
Russell Aaron Brogdon
Date of Birth: February 20, 1968

TO ALL INTERESTED PERSONS including creditors and heirs of the deceased whose address(es) are unknown and whose interest in the matter may be barred or affected by the following:

Be advised that a Petition for Determination of Heirs has been filed with the Court and a hearing on said Petition will be held on **April 7, 2026, at 09:30 A.M.** via Zoom through the Cass County Law and Courts Building, 60296 M62, Cassopolis, Michigan 49031.

NOTICE TO CREDITORS:
The Decedent, Russell Aaron Brogdon, who lived at 22451 Painter Street, Edwardsburg, Michigan, died November 27, 2025.

Creditors of the Decedent are notified that all claims against the estate will be forever barred unless presented to Cynthia Brogdon, named personal representative, or to the probate court at 60296 M62, Cassopolis Michigan 49031 and the named personal representative within four (4) months after the date of publication of this notice.

March 16, 2026

Robert L. Landgraf, Jr. (P23000)
Attorney
Post Office Box 1310
Niles, Michigan 49120
(269) 683 - 8300

Cynthia Brogdon
Petitioner
c/o Post Office Box 1310
Niles, Michigan 49120-1310

Annual Performance Report for Housing The Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indian's **Annual Performance Report for Housing** is available for any residents to review. You can view it on our website at Housing Programs – Pokagon Band of Potawatomi or come and review it at the Housing & Community Development office beginning Monday, February 23 through Monday, March 23, 2026. The address for Housing & Community Development is 57824 Potawatomi Trail, Dowagiac, MI 49047.
Migweth Thank you,

STATE OF MICHIGAN
PROBATE COURT
COUNTY OF CASS

PUBLICATION OF NOTICE

In the matter of: THE RSSS TRUST of 2005

TO ALL INTERESTED PERSONS: Whose address(es) are unknown and whose interest in the matter may be barred or affected by the following:

TAKE NOTICE: The decedent, Robert Lee Smith, who lived at 70105 Beach Drive, Edwardsburg, Michigan 49112, died on January 26, 2026. There is no personal representative of the decedent's estate.

Creditors of the decedent are notified that all claims against the decedent's estate will be forever barred unless presented to Scott Smith, at 1360 Wood Hill Lane, Lake Forest, Illinois 60045, and Samantha Schuller, at 4 Lake View Rd., Hawthorn Woods, IL 60047, co-successor trustees of The RSSS Trust of 2005 dated September 16, 2022, within four (4) months of the date of publication of this notice.

Date: March 17, 2026

Petitioners:
Scott A. Smith
1360 Wood Hill Lane
Lake Forest, IL 60045
(847) 528-3868

Samantha Schuller
4 Lake View Road
Hawthorn Woods, IL 60047
(847) 420-1950

Attorney:
Janet G. Horvath-Bar No P68501
1251 North Eddy Street, Ste 203
South Bend, IN 46617
(574) 575-4147

0900 LEGALS

Economy Storage, 2206 Yankee Street, Niles, MI 49120. Auction Saturday March 28, 2026, at 10:00 a.m.

Unit #	Name
9/185	Candy Whitmire
22	Amber Bedenfield
28	Emalee Anderson
50	Lillian Joyce Bennett
67	Jerome Jankowiak
82	Erica Pitone
94	Joshua Thompson
125/179	Steve Kelley
127/633	Chris Norris
145/467/468	Michael Merritt
148	Gloster Johnson
164	Bradley Hattenback
183	Cindy Fisher
184/66	Mary Anderson
190/306	Linda Nilson
191	Alan Smith
192	Patricia Yoder
211	Kimberlie Mervine
254	Paula Diane Brown
268	Dan Hoft
273	Tony Pompey
278	Chelsie Carlyle
282	Keely Collier
324	Woodrow Bowers
326	Seth Weaver
328	Kevin Reed
331	Valerie Outlaw
338	Frances Lamagro
342	Terrence Moss
346	DaMonica Williams
379	Bobbie Helms
389	Parnell Jenkins
410/534	Rebecca Coleman
429	Aaron Haynes
438	Adrianna Affriso
442	Dawn Hojara
451	Jean Fitch
452	Tyler Mahar
492/676	Malawi Association
530	Justin Landis
533	Ashley Scantlon
541	Nicole Hurt
639	Barry Brann
665	Rodney Prescott
677/567	Julie Potate

Niles U-Stor-It, 1314 E. Main Street, Niles, MI 49120. Auction Saturday March 28, 2026, at 10:30 a.m.

47	Jasmine Collett
54	Cynthia Swisher

J & J Storage, 2220 S. 13th Street and 2627 S. 11th Street, Niles, MI 49120. Auction Saturday March 28, 2026, at 11:00 a.m.

31/28	Christine Runner
57	James Colburn
220A	Susan Tanke
290A	Doug Mitchell
301A	Matt Mazingo
140	Ronnie West
176	Dacia Bush
227	Jennifer Nichols
228	Michael Hoadley
238/466	James Diss
263	Tamara Holmes
292	The Woodshed Crafts
312	Joseph Mayo
314	Tracey Parrish
327	Robert Davis
377	Christy Stevens
422	Jeremy Davis
452	Aaron Smith
481	Natosha Libertowski
509	Samantha Curtis

People Do Read Small Ads. You Did!

0900 LEGALS

Abandoned vehicle auction March 26, 2026 at 8:30am Road Runner towing and recovery

2014 Ford
Vin 1FADP3E28EL225495
2001 Ford
Vin 1FTRW07L41KA51660

Contact Road Runner Towing at 269-429-5080 Monday through Friday 8:30 AM to 5 PM for viewing locations and times social distancing rules still apply. Bidding starts at acquired fees

Niles Community Schools is accepting bids for lawn mower services for the 2026 season. Please contact Steven O'Connor at 269-684-8020 for the full bid documents.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Jefferson Township Board of Trustees Regular Meeting Synopsis, March 12, 2026
Supervisor Hass called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM.
Present: Brunner, Bundle, Gillam, Hass, Mendenhall.
REGULAR MEETING BOARD ACTION
• February 12, 2026 meeting minutes approved.
•Treasurer's Report given.
•Payment of bills authorized.
Respectfully submitted,
Valerie Locke, Clerk

PUBLIC NOTICE OF HERBICIDE APPLICATION
The Daltons Inc., its main office at 8857 N. Syracuse-Webster Rd., Syracuse, IN 46567, has been contracted by Cass County Road Commission to perform custom chemical vegetation control maintenance services at designated roadside guardrail locations throughout the county.

In doing so, they will be broadcast applying the following EPA-registered materials: Bayer/Envu Esplanade 200SC (Indaziflam), Bayer/Envu Method 240SL (Aminocyclopyrachlor), Alligare Imazapyr 4SL (Isopropylamine salt) or BASF Arsenal 4#.
Do not enter or allow entry into treated areas until sprays have dried.

This application will be completed by certified applicators employed by The Daltons Inc., during the months of April and/or May. Additional information may be requested by contacting David Mohler or Brad Bolinger at 574-267-7511

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AS A DEBT COLLECTOR, WE ARE ATTEMPTING TO COLLECT A DEBT AND ANY INFORMATION OBTAINED WILL BE USED FOR THAT PURPOSE. ATTENTION HOMEOWNER: IF YOU ARE A MILITARY SERVICE MEMBER ON ACTIVE DUTY, IF YOUR PERIOD OF ACTIVE DUTY HAS CONCLUDED LESS THAN 90 DAYS AGO, OR IF YOU HAVE BEEN ORDERED TO ACTIVE DUTY, PLEASE CONTACT THE ATTORNEY FOR THE PARTY FORECLOSING THE MORTGAGE AT THE TELEPHONE NUMBER STATED IN THIS NOTICE. Notice of Foreclosure by Advertisement – Notice is given under section 3212 of the revised judicature act of 1961, 1961 PA 236, MCL 600.3212, that the following mortgage will be foreclosed by a sale of the mortgaged premises, or some part of them, at a public auction sale to the highest bidder for cash or cashier's check at the place of holding the circuit court in Cass County, starting promptly at 10:00 AM. on April 15, 2026. The amount due on the mortgage may be greater on the day of the sale. Placing the highest bid at the sale does not automatically entitle the purchaser to free and clear ownership of the property. A potential purchaser is encouraged to contact the county register of deeds office or a title insurance company, either of which may charge a fee for this information. Default having been made in the terms and conditions of a certain mortgage made by James Snyder and Shella Ann Havener of Cass County, Michigan, Mortgagor to Fifth Third Bank (Western Michigan) dated the 28th day of May, 2019, and recorded in the office of the Register of Deeds, for the County of Cass and State of Michigan, on the 3rd day of July, 2019, Book 1157, Page 24, Instrument No. 154453 of the Cass County Records on which mortgage there is claimed to be due, at the date of this notice, for principal of $96,044.48 plus accrued interest at 5.00000% percent per annum. Which said premises are described as follows: All that certain piece or parcel of land situated in the Town of Howard, in the County of Cass and State of Michigan and described as follows to wit: Lot 50 Yankee Heights, according to the plat thereof recorded in Liber 1 of Plats, Page 153, Cass County Records Commonly known as: 2550 Juniper Road, Niles, MI 49120 Tax ID: 1402022005000 If the property is sold at a foreclosure sale the borrower, pursuant to MCLA 600.3278 will be held responsible to the person who buys the property at the mortgage foreclosure sale or to the mortgage holder for damaging the property during the redemption period. The redemption period shall be six months from the date of such sale, unless determined abandoned in accordance with MCL 600.3241a, in which case the redemption period shall be 30 days from the date of such sale. FinCEN reporting will be required of all successful purchasers, absent a lawful exemption. Dated: March 14, 2026, By: Benjamin N. Hoen #P-81415 Weltman, Weinberg & Reis Co., L.P.A. 5990 West Creek Road, Suite 200 Independence, OH 44131 Telephone: 216-739-5100 Fax: 216-363-4034 Email: bhoen@weltman.com WWR#: 22-000663-1 (03-14)(04-04)

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Modineer Company LLC
Assistant Business Unit Leader
Perform the manufacturing process engineering research, design, development, & day-to-day activities of metal component manufacturing processes & systems & directly supervise 2 employees.
Bachelor's degree in engineering management, Mechanical Engineering, Industrial Engineering, or Manufacturing Engineering is required (Foreign educational equivalent is acceptable). Also required is 6 months of employment experience as an Operations Consultant, Industrial Engineer, or Quality Engineer. Demonstrated ability in utilizing the following computer software is required through education, experience, or a combination of both education and experience: Microsoft Visual Basic for Applications (VBA); SolidWorks; and CATIA.
Place of employment is at Modineer Company LLC, 2121 W. Chicago Rd., Niles, MI 49120. Send resume to: Modineer Company LLC, Attn: Sabrina Pesce-HR Mgr., 2102 S. 11th St., Niles, MI 49120.

Township of Calvin Annual Meeting Notice
Annual Township Meeting to be held at the William J. Robinson Community Center (Calvin Township Hall), 18727 Mount Zion St. Cassopolis, MI 49031 Phone:269-476-2620

Annual Township Meeting
Meeting Date: Tuesday, April 14, 2026
Meeting Time: 5:30 pm, Annual Township Meeting
Regular Township Board meeting immediately following.

This notice is posted in compliance with the Open Meetings Act, Public Act 267 of 1976, as amended, (MCL 41.72a(2)(3)), and the Americans With Disabilities Act.

The Calvin Township Board will provide necessary reasonable auxiliary aids and services, such as signers for the hearing impaired and audio recordings of printed materials being considered at the meeting, to individuals with disabilities at the meeting or public hearing upon 4-day notice to the Calvin Township Board. Individuals with disabilities requiring auxiliary aids or services should contact the Township Board by writing or calling the following:
Contact Calvin Township Clerk at 2020.meanderson@gmail.com or 269-476-2620

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING
Proposed Property Rezoning
MILTON TOWNSHIP, CASS COUNTY, MI
32097 Bertrand Street, Niles, MI 49120

To: The residents and property owners of Milton Township, Cass County Michigan and any other interested parties.
The Milton Township Planning Commission will hold a Public Hearing during its regular monthly meeting on Tuesday, April 7, 2026, at 7:00 p.m., at the Milton Township Hall, 32097 Bertrand Street, Niles, MI 49120, for the purpose of considering an application from Philip and Lori Egert for rezoning of parcel 14-070-004-005-00 located at 68503 Surges Rd., Niles, MI, from RR, Rural Residential to A, Agricultural, pursuant to Chapter 18, Section 18.06 (b) of the Milton Township Zoning Ordinance.
Written comments will be taken from any interested persons concerning these proposed map amendments, at the Milton Township Hall, at the address above, at any time during regular business hours up to the night of the meeting. Any persons interested in this rezoning are invited to attend the Public Hearing. Copies of the Application to Rezone and applicable maps are available for inspection at the Milton Township Hall during regular business hours. If you are planning to attend this hearing, and require auxiliary aids or services, should contact the Township Clerk by calling 269-684-7262.

Milton Township Planning Commission

Howard Charter Township Cass County, Michigan Board of Trustees March 17, 2026
The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. at the Township Hall.
Board Action
Approved Meeting Agenda.
Approved the minutes of the 2/17/26, 2/19/26 and 3/5/26, and 3/12/26 Board Meetings
Approved the financial report with an ending balance of 1,999,869.40 including a CD
Approved the payment of bills through March 17, 2026
Approved the departmental reports
Discussion on Sewer Rates
Approved 2026-2027 annual monthly meeting schedules
Approved the contracts with Siegfried Crandall, PC as the auditor and Berends, Hendricks & Stuit Insurance Agency as the insurance agent, Darr Phillips for ordinance enforcement cleanups, Darr Phillps for ordinance enforcement mowing and Snowplow. Bauckham, Thall et all for Attorney. Cass Count Sheriff Office for Law Enforcement, Michiana Cleaning for Office cleaning, and Zoning Solutions for Ordinance Enforcement.
Approved the contract renewals for the Building Inspector Adam Dahlgren, Electrical Inspector Ron Bellaire, Plumbing/Mechanical Inspector John Dobberteen, and Miss Dig Inspector Lisa Guyott and Northrup Assessing.
Appointed Chris Corzine as Fire Chief, Chris Korp as Assistant Fire Chief, and Tim Phillips as Captain and Fire Inspector and Chad Bundy as Lieutenant.
Approved the Supervisor, Cass County Sheriff Deputy and Zoning Solutions as ordinance enforcement officer for all ordinances, Zoning Administrator as an enforcement officer for the Zoning Ordinance, and the Fire Department Officers as enforcement officers for burning and fire ordinances
Approved Resolution 2026-007, the Salary Resolution,
Approved Resolution 2026-006, the General Appropriations Act Resolution
Approved the 2026-2027 Holiday Schedules
Approved the proposed 2026-2027 General Fund Budget
Approved the proposed 2026-2027 Ambulance, Street Light, Improvement Capital, Building, New Construction, Sewer, Fire Truck and Weed Eradication Funds Budgets
Approved 2026-2027 pay scale
Approved NATS local match $4080.00
Public Comment Public comment occurred
Adjourn the meeting at 7:30pm

RESERVE THIS SPACE
TODAY!

OUTDOORS

Submitting hunting or fishing photos

Have a behemoth buck, a tremendous turkey or super-sized salmon? Please submit photos to sports@TheHP.com.

Your photo must be in focus, all persons in the photo must be identified, and the general location of the hunt must be provided (for example, 10-point buck shot in Benton Township, black bear shot near Munising, Mich., etc.)

Photo provided / Brad Anderson

A male pileated woodpecker on March 1 at the suet feeder of Brad and Hannah Anderson of Bridgman.

Pileated woodpecker has made comeback in Michigan

On March 1, a male pileated woodpecker made himself conspicuous to the lens of Brad Anderson by partaking in the suet Brad and his wife Hannah and offered.

The pileated woodpecker is the largest woodpecker in Michigan.

Jonathan Wuepper
Southwest Michigan Wildlife

Discounting the almost certainly extinct ivory-billed woodpecker, the pileated reigns as the largest woodpecker in North America. It has a wingspan of about 26 to 29 inches and a total length, from head to tail, of about 16 to 19 inches. Plumages are similar in both sexes, with the exception of a red mark on each side of the male's cheeks. I often refer to this red mark as the male pileated's "mustache".

The pileated woodpecker currently ranges across all of Michigan and nearby states, although it is less common in the southeast counties where less second-growth forest exists. At the time of European settlement, the pileated woodpecker was abundant across Michigan. From the late 1800s until approximately the 1950s it was nearly extirpated from the heavy farming region and cities from Muskegon to Bay Counties south to the state line.

Since World War II, there has been a gradual increase in the population in the southern lower peninsula due to second growth forest. As of the mid 2020s, the pileated woodpecker is once again a breeding species in all of Michigan's 83 counties.

Along the wooded floodplain forests of the St. Joseph River during mid-February of this year, I witnessed an adult pair of pileated woodpeckers in courtship activity, drumming loudly and often during February and March. While adults pair bond for life, they continue the courtship drumming to reaffirm their nest site territory and ward off potential encroaching pairs or lone males.

Nesting begins in mid-to late April in our southern counties and in May in the Upper Peninsula. Cavity nests are excavated by both parents, usually in a dead or dying tree, and lined with wood chips. There, an average of four eggs are laid, and are incubated by both male and female.

The diet of the pileated woodpecker is primarily insects during the warm months, supplemented by fruits, nuts and sap. Its favorite food appears to be carpenter ants, both adults and larvae. In winter the species feeds on the larvae of ants, suet and fruit. It is a permanent resident across its range, but individuals may wander in winter in search of food.

On March 9, Steve Frappier of St. Joseph captured a photo of an eastern fox squirrel. The eastern fox squirrel is common in open and semi-open areas in Southwest Michigan. While it prefers oak-hickory forests, it is often found in suburban landscapes.

Speaking of squirrels, the groundhog, also called woodchuck, is also a squirrel. It is a true hibernator that emerges in February in our area. I saw my first woodchuck of the year on Feb. 28, which was a roadkill on Cleveland Avenue just south of the Galien village limits.

Jonathan Wuepper is an area naturalist. Report your sightings to him at wuepperj@gmail.com

Photo provided / Steve Frappier

An eastern fox squirrel on March 9.

Man circles Lake Superior, finding climbs, islands, waterfalls, parks ripe for discovery

By BOB TIMMONS
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)

MINNEAPOLIS — A few trips in the 1970s to help build the Border Route Trail in the lake country between Minnesota and Canada sent a jolt of excitement through one of its volunteers.

Rudi Hargesheimer, a young University of Minnesota geography major at the time, was fascinated by the scenery along the North Shore of Lake Superior.

The trail work ended, but Hargesheimer returned again and again on his own time to hike and ski the parks and paths that strung together the shore's abundance of rivers, dramatic rock formations and boreal beauty.

Once he had the shore "memorized," his curiosity wandered farther north.

If the North Shore is so great, he thought, what was it like on the Canadian side?

Hargesheimer, a longtime manager at Midwest Mountaineering in Minneapolis who retired in 2016, has methodically answered his question over the last 40-plus years. He's taken as many as 15 trips around the big lake, making drives from 1,300 to 1,500 miles depending on the route. It's known as the Circle Tour.

Once past the Ontario, Canada, shores, he continued to investigate Michigan's Upper Peninsula and Wisconsin and even rediscovered parts of Minnesota.

Some of what he found – unexpected lake views and striking landscapes all to himself – excited and surprised him. He had a recurring thought: People don't know what they are missing. They should go north, not west.

Now, Hargesheimer is set on inspiring Circle Tour travelers with a new book about his experiences. Through his business North Shore Photo Art, he has published "Superior Trails: A Photo Tour of Lake Superior's Best Hiking Trails."

"The book is not intended as a trail guide," he said. "The idea is to whet people's appetite to go to these places, to not tell them everything they need to know."

Ontario's north shore was a quick lesson in the diversity of the Great Lake's landscapes and where it diverges from the feel of Minnesota's North Shore.

Hargesheimer documented scenes of rocks and beaches scoured by wind and waves, striking overlooks and waterfalls. But he also captured what makes Ontario's shore unique: Islands, breaking the water like exposed boulders, are ubiquitous. So, too, are inlets. A stark contrast to the ocean-like views from Hwy. 61.

He was awed by the vertical red-rock cliffs of Sleeping Giant Provincial Park, east of Thunder Bay. The scale rivaled western mountain landscapes, Hargesheimer said, and you won't fight the crowds.

He returned repeatedly to a Canadian national park on Superior's northeast shore, too.

Sarett Nature Center

Sarett Nature Stewards: 2-4 p.m. each Wednesday. This program is a way to experience Sarett in a whole different way. By being a nature steward you are helping Sarett but you also gain a sense of well-being. Sarett's crew will teach you many different skills such as collecting viable seeds for future planting, how to identify invasive species from native ones, removing invasive plants, and more. Ages 10+.

Birding for Beginners: 9-11 a.m. March 28, April 11, April 18 and May 2. This introduction will cover everything you need to know about birding, whether you are wondering which birds are visiting your feeders or if you want to go far afield. Sarett will even provide binoculars for you to use during class time. Cost is $5 per class for members, $7 for non-members. Call 927-4832 to register.

Email info for Get Outdoors to sports@TheHP.com, or call 429-1294 by Monday.

Raucous bird tornado touches down as snow geese make annual flight to Arctic

By MARK SCOLFORO and TASSANEE VEJPONGSA
Associated Press

KLEINFELTERSVILLE, Pa. — A few dozen birdwatchers gathered in the predawn darkness to wait for the moment when thousands of migrating snow geese stopped honking and preening to suddenly take flight from a Pennsylvania reservoir.

The mesmerizing display, about an hour after sunrise, was over almost as soon as it began. The birds circled a few times and then headed out to neighboring farm fields, seeking unharvested grains and other sustenance on their epic annual spring flight northward into New York state and Quebec.

The Pennsylvania reservoir was built a half-century ago to attract waterfowl, and over the years the gaggle has grown. Pennsylvania Game Commission environmental education specialist Payton Miller described it as a raucous bird tornado that lifts off the water.

"All it takes is for me to come out here on a really nice morning where there's a huge morning flight and I'm kind of reminded how awesome it is to see such a large number of such a beautiful bird," Miller said. "I never get sick of it."

Among those taking it all in was Adrian Binns, a safari guide from Paoli, Pennsylvania, who went to the Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area for "the whole enjoyment of seeing something you don't see every day."

Snow geese have been arriving in growing numbers at the 6,300-acre Middle Creek property since the late 1990s. At this time of year, they have just spent months along the Atlantic coast, from New Jersey south to the Carolinas, with many of them overwintering on the Delmarva Peninsula that forms the Chesapeake Bay.

They don't stay long at Middle Creek – it's just a way station on their journey to summer breeding grounds in the Canadian Arctic and western Greenland. But for a few short weeks, they are the main attraction at Middle Creek, which draws about 150,000 visitors annually – including about a thousand hunters.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission, which owns Middle Creek, says about 100,000 snow geese were roosting there on the busiest day last year, on par with recent peak activity but below the single-day record of about 200,000 on Feb. 21, 2018.

Snow geese are doing well, but their large numbers have come with a cost. According to a 2017 study published by Springer Nature, greater snow geese grew in population from about 3,000 in the early 20th century to some 700,000 by the 1990s. By some estimates, there are about a million of the birds now – along with maybe 10 million of lesser snow geese, which are smaller – that also breed in the Arctic.

The number of migrating tundra swans at Middle Creek, while far lower, has also increased over time, from a dozen or so in the mid-1970s to 5,000 or more in recent years. Middle Creek birders have also identified more than 280 bird species on the site, among them bald eagles, northern harriers, ospreys and owls.

As snow goose numbers have boomed in recent decades, wildlife officials in the U.S. and Canada have navigated a balancing act involving hunting regulations, concerns about crop damage, shifts in migration and changes to overwintering patterns. Environmental damage from overgrazing in the Arctic has led experts to conclude that the birds are overabundant.

David M. Bird, a McGill University wildlife biology professor, described the population as "probably one of the biggest conservation problems facing wildlife biologists in North America today." Snow geese feed by pulling up plants by the roots, which damages habitats for themselves, various birds and other wildlife.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission reported recently that avian influenza viruses, present in the state since 2022, continue to circulate among the state's wild birds.

Robert F. Bukaty / AP

Snow geese take off from a reservoir at the Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area, on March 6 in Kleinfeltersville, Pa.

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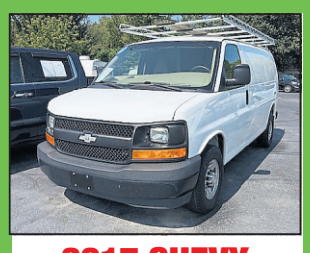

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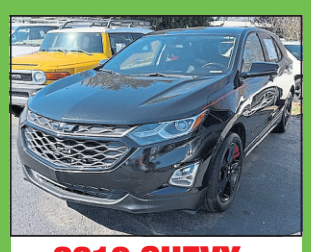

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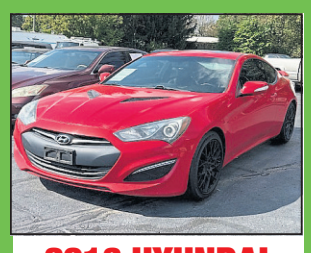

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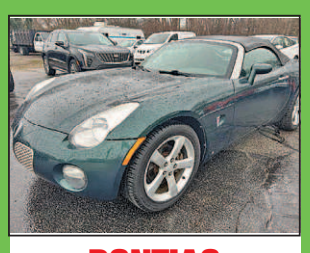

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